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TOTAL WAR CREATIVE ASSEMBLY SEGA

ISSUE 160 MAY 2015 develop

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

11 - 15 ›

MASTER THE ART OF GAMES MARKETING
Industry experts from development, publishing, marketing and more offer their advice on how to get your game discovered, attract the attention of the press and harness your growing community

19 - 24 ›

LOCALISATION
Our four-page special

33 - 35 ›

MODELLING
Diversify your game's cast

36 ›

TOP TIPS
Experts on character design

REGULARS Develop Diary **P07** • #DevelopJobs **P27** • Directory – Spotlights **P45** • Family Tree **P50**

ALPHA

Develop Awards 2015 **P04**
This year's finalists revealed
Interface **P06**
Diary Dates **P07**
Joost Superdata **P08**
Understanding mobile
Playmob **P09**
Awareness-raising games

BETA

50 marketing tips **P11**
Get your game noticed
DigitalXtra.net **P16**
Indigo Pearl's newest tool
Localisation Special **P19**
How to conquer the world
LocalizeDirect **P22**
OneSky's global guide **P24**

BUILD

Key Release **P38**
Toon Boom's Harmony 12
Heard About **P39**
Ori and the Blind Forest
Made with Marmalade **P40**
Unreal Diaries **P41**
The Future State **P42**
Unity Focus **P43**

EDITORIAL

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

GAMES DEVELOPERS FACE much the same dilemma as authors: while releasing a game or book has never been easier, actually selling it has never been more challenging.

But just as authors have learned that writing a potential best-seller is only half the battle, indies and smaller studios are learning that success depends on more than just developing a great game – it's as much about business skills as it is about creativity.

That's seemingly horrific news for anyone that has let themselves get washed away by the indie movement over the past few years. The success of so many titles that began more as personal projects than bids to create the next billion-dollar franchise has encouraged so many developers to shun life in a large studio in favour of doing what they love: making games.

But sadly the reality is this: if you want to make a living from your games, you must be willing to put in the legwork to get it in front of people. No one will deny it's hard work – particularly with the hordes of other indies out there trying to shift their quirky creation – but, like so many games today, marketing is easy to learn, hard to master.

And you don't have to do it alone. There are so many PR agencies and indie publishers out there, ready to offer decades of experience in selling games. Even if you don't want to hire their services, many are willing to offer advice, as are some of the most successful indie developers.

It might not be what you signed up for, but marketing your game is the only way to reap the rewards you deserve for all the hard work you put in making the damn thing. After all, ongoing sales are what's most likely to fund your next hit.

James Batchelor
jbatchelor@nbmedia.com

Develop Awards 2015: The finalists revealed

137 companies and 47 games in the running for this year's awards ● New categories created, with a total of 20 prizes up for grabs ● Winners to be announced on July 15th at Brighton ceremony

by James Batchelor

THE FINALISTS FOR the 2015 Develop Industry Excellence Awards have been selected, with close to 140 companies competing for glory at this year's event.

2015 has been one of the strongest years for submissions, with more than 250 companies nominated, but sadly not everyone can make the shortlist.

There are 137 companies among this year's finalists, encompassing tools providers, technology and services firms, outsourcers, and specialists in audio, VFX, QA and recruitment – not to mention 71 games studios.

The finalists hail from all over the UK and Europe, with representatives of countries such as France, Germany, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Italy and more in the mix.

The developer with the most nominations this year is Britain's own Creative Assembly, with three nominations for the seminal *Alien: Isolation* and a nod for the firm itself in the In-House Studio category.

The *Alien* studio is followed closely by the Ubisoft-owned Reflections, which racks up three nominations – two of which were for its experimental title turned PC hit *Grow Home*. Evolution Studios also stands with three nominations, including two for PS4 racer *Driveclub*.

Overall, publisher Ubisoft leads with the most nominations thanks to three for Reflections, two for Ubisoft Montpellier's acclaimed *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* and one for the new Climax-developed *Assassin's Creed Chronicles*.

Close behind with five places in the shortlist is Square Enix, thanks to double nominations for Mediatonic's *Heavenstrike Rivals* and Dontnod's episodic series *Life Is Strange*, plus a slot in the Publishing Hero category.

The Develop Awards have been revamped this year, split into three categories: Creativity, Tech & Services and Studio. Due to the flood of nominations this year, new and updated categories make up for a total of 20 awards.

New prizes this year include: Technology Provider, for firms that offer hardware and technological support to developers; two New Games IP awards, one for PC/console and one for mobile; and two Creative Outsourcer awards, one for audio and the other for both visual contributions and outsourced development work.

Following the popularity of last year's new categories, there are separate awards for QA and Localisation, Design and Creativity Tools, and Production Tools.

The winners will be announced during this year's Develop Awards ceremony at the Brighton Hilton Metropole on Wednesday, July 15th. The winner of this year's special awards, such as Development Legend, will be revealed closer to the time.

To book your ticket, contact Kathryn Humphrey via **khumphrey@nbmedia.com** or call her on 01992 535646.

For more information on sponsorship opportunities, contact Charlotte Nangle via **cnangle@nbmedia.com** or call her on 01992 515303.

Current Develop Awards supporters include Gold Partners UKIE, Amiqus and Unity, Table Gift Partner OPM, Drinks Reception Partner Epic Games and Event Partner Aardvark Swift. Unity is also partner for the Micro Studio Award. ■

// MEANWHILE ON DEVELOP-ONLINE.NET

Designing Spy Watch for the Apple Watch: Bossa's story
deve1op.net/1aS0Fwy

Bigpoint: 'If you're in free-to-play you should be targeting China'
deve1op.net/1lG0rat

Life after Prey 2: How Human Head recovered from cancellation
deve1op.net/1HM1XVa

DEVELOP AWARDS 2015: THE FINALISTS

CREATIVITY

NEW GAMES IP - PC/CONSOLE
Block N Load – Jagex Games Studio
Cities: Skylines – Colossal Order
Dying Light – Techland
Grow Home – Reflections, a Ubisoft Studio
I Am Bread – Bossa Studios
Life is Strange – Dontnod Entertainment
The Escapists – Mouldy Toof Studios
TerraTech – Payload Studios

NEW GAMES IP – MOBILE
Plunder Pirates – Midoki
Boom Beach – Supercell
Best Fiends – Seriously
Heavenstrike Rivals – Mediatonic/Square Enix
Playworld Superheroes – Starship
World of Warriors – Candy Labs/Mind Candy
Size Does Matter – DOS Studios
King of Thieves – ZeptoLab UK

USE OF A LICENCE OR IP
Alien: Isolation – Creative Assembly
Angry Birds Transformers – Exient
Assassin's Creed Chronicles – Climax Studios
Disney Infinity 2.0: Guardians of the Galaxy playset – Studio Gobo
Forza Horizon 2 – Playground Games
Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions – Lucid Games
LEGO Batman 3: Beyond Gotham – TT Games
Talisman: Digital Edition – Nomad Games

VISUAL ARTS
Alien: Isolation – Creative Assembly
Beseige – Spiderling Games
Driveclub – Evolution Studios
Elite: Dangerous – Frontier Developments
Grow Home – Reflections, a Ubisoft Studio
Grand Theft Auto V (PC) – Rockstar North
Lumino City – State of Play Games
Shards of War – Bigpoint

AUDIO ACCOMPLISHMENT
Alien: Isolation – Creative Assembly
Angry Birds Epic – Chimera Entertainment
Elite: Dangerous – Frontier Developments
Forza Horizon 2 – Playground Games
The Sailor's Dream – Simogo
Dreamfall Chapters: The Longest Journey – Red Thread Games
Driveclub – Evolution Studios
Valiant Hearts: The Great War – Ubisoft Montpellier

USE OF NARRATIVE
80 Days – Inkle Studios
Heavenstrike Rivals – Mediatonic/Square Enix
Life Is Strange – Dontnod Entertainment
LittleBigPlanet 3 – Sumo Digital
Schrödinger's Cat and the Raiders of the Lost Quark – Italic Pig
Soul Axiom – Wales Interactive
Sunless Sea – Failbetter Games
Valiant Hearts: The Great War – Ubisoft Montpellier

TECH & SERVICES

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER
ARM
Dimensional Imaging
Imagination Technologies
Intel
Multiplay
Nvidia
Oculus VR
SoftLayer Technologies

DESIGN & CREATIVITY TOOL
Enlighten 3 with Forge – Geomerics
Granite – Graphine Software
Havok Cloth – Havok
SpeedTree for Games – SpeedTree
Substance Designer 5 – Allegorithmic
Umbra 3 –Umbra Software
Wwise – Audiokinetic
Yebis 3 – Silicon Studio

PRODUCTION TOOL
Deadline – Thinkbox Software
Fabric – Tazman Audio
GameBench – GameBench
GameSparks – GameSparks
Marmalade – Marmalade Technologies
Perforce – Perforce Software
Simplygon – Donya Labs
Shotgun 6 – Shotgun Software/Autodesk

ENGINE
ChilliSource – ChilliWorks
Construct 2 – Scirra
CryEngine – Crytek
GameGuru – The Game Creators
GameMaker – YoYo Games
PlayCanvas – PlayCanvas
Unity 5 – Unity Technologies
Unreal Engine 4 – Epic Games

SERVICES
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DeltaDNA
Pinewood Studios Group
Player Research
Soundcuts
Sperasoft

QA & LOCALISATION
LocalizeDirect
Keywords Studios
OneSky
Pole To Win
Testology
Testronic
Universally Speaking
VMC

CREATIVE OUTSOURCER – VISUAL & DEVELOPMENT
Axis – *Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thrones* trailer
BlitWorks – *Don't Stave* (PS Vita)
D3T – *Super Stardust Ultra* (PS4)
Just Add Water – *Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty*
Realtime UK – *Smite* trailer
Speech Graphics – *Shadow of Mordor*

CREATIVE OUTSOURCER – AUDIO
93 Steps – Wargaming trailers
Christopher Randle – *LA Cops*
OMUK – *Tropico 5*
SIDE – *Alien: Isolation*
Sounding Sweet – *Forza Horizon 2*
Stafford Bawler – *Monument Valley: Forgotten Shores*

RECRUITER
Aardvark Swift
Amiqus
Avatar Games
Creative Personnel
Datascope
Guru Careers
OPM
SpecialMove

STUDIOS

PUBLISHING HERO
505 Games
Chillingo
Curve Digital
Deep Silver
Greenshoots
Team17
SCEE Strategic Content
Square Enix

MICRO STUDIO
Presented by Unity
Christian West
Guerilla Tea
Lamplight Studios
Mode7
Modern Dream
Mouldy Toof Studios
Roll7
Team Lumo

INDEPENDENT STUDIO
8-bit Studio
Amplitude Studios
Eight Pixels Square
Goodgame Studios
InnoGames
Lucid Games
Rebellion
Space Ape Games

IN-HOUSE STUDIO
Candy Labs
Creative Assembly
Evolution Studios
Reflections, a Ubisoft studio
Rockstar North
Sega Hardlight
Sports Interactive
Ubisoft BlueByte

NEW STUDIO
Deco Digital
Freejam
Payload Studios
Seriously
Starship
Team Junkfish

Get ready for Interface

Nearly 100 games firms ready for our new games pitching and private meeting event in London ● Takes place May 14th in central London ● Affordable rates plus free basic passes for indies

THERE ARE JUST a few days left to go until Interface, a brand new pitching and content event for the games business in the UK.

Taking place on May 14th at the Candid Arts Trust near Angel tube in central London, Interface is brought to you by the teams behind *Develop* and *MCV*.

Interface aims to bring game creators together with investors, publishers and other potential partners with a mix of public expo, private meetings and breakout sessions.

> ***"Interface aims to bring game creators together with investors, publishers and other potential partners."***

The day-long event has been designed with small developers in mind, with affordable rates for expo spaces and Interface Meeting System tickets for firms of four or less staff. A basic expo pass is also free to anyone at firms of that size.

Find out more at **www.interface.events**. ■

THE MEETING SYSTEM

AT PRESS TIME, we have nine major firms signed up to host private meetings in the Interface Meeting System private floor.

505 Games, Rising Star Games, Curve Studios, Tilting Point and Fireproof Games are the established publishers looking to sign more content. Event sponsor and new publisher Green Man Loaded is also meeting studios to find titles for its new label. Meanwhile Pollen VC, Indigo Pearl and Unity are all on hand to talk to developers about their solutions for finance, code delivery and technology.

On the flipside, we have over 30 studios registered for the meeting system and set to meet some or all of the above on the day.

> ***"There's still time to get involved in the Meeting System as a publisher meeting host or as a delegate."***

Our meeting system delegates are a mix of new and established studios with new concepts to share or businesses to invest in. A handful of registered firms aren't even officially announced yet, and hoping to score a business deal at Interface – or at the very least the meeting that starts the conversation – before coming out of stealth mode.

There's still time to get involved in the Meeting System, either as a publisher meeting host or as a delegate. It costs £499 for a publisher table, or delegate prices are £149 for studios of over four staff or £49 for studios of four or less. *Find out more at **www.interface.events**, contact **interface@nbmedia.com** for general questions, or contact our account manager Charlotte Nangle direct on **cnangle@nbmedia.com** or call 01992 535 647.*

GAMES SHOWCASE

INTERFACE INCLUDES A public expo featuring new and upcoming games from indie studios plus key services firms and publishers.

We have 20 exhibitors from across Europe, including an Indie Demo Zone hosted and curated by Unity.

There are still one or two spaces left if you want to showcase your game or company.

Indie demo tables (for studios of four or less) are £179, while a standard table for bigger studios is £399. Both include access to the Interface Meeting System, so you can showcase your game to our expo attendees (including invited press), but also pitch ideas and content to our publishing and investment meeting hosts behind closed doors.

LIVE AND KICKING

THE LIVE-STAGE conference of Interface features key speakers talking about all the issues that matter to Interface. Namely: getting your business up and running; pitching and finding a publisher; PR, marketing and promoting your game; and how to grow a games business in the UK.

We've got an opening keynote speech lined up from Execution Labs' Jason Della Rocca (*pictured right*), while Sony's Shahid Ahmad (*pictured bottom right*) will give the closing speech.

Inbetween we'll be running a set of panel discussions and microtalks with incisive content for games studios.

The Interface live-stage is sponsored by Pollen VC, a velocity capital firm that specialises in helping devs fund, sustain and grow their games.

Interface

OUR SPONSORS

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Live Stage Partner POLLEN VELOCITY CAPITAL

Premium Stand Partner

Media Partner GAMEREPUBLIC

DEVELOP DIARY

Your complete games development events calendar for the months ahead

AT A GLANCE

MAY 8TH
Victory in Europe Day
Marking the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII in Europe.

MAY 14TH
Max Max: Fury Road
The post-apocalyptic series returns with Tom Hardy behind the wheel.

MAY 19TH
The Witcher III: Wild Hunt
CD Projekt Red's mammoth RPG finally arrives. We hope.

MAY 25TH
Spring Bank Holiday
Don't forget, you get a Monday off. Last one until August, so enjoy it.

MAY 29TH
San Andreas
Sadly not a GTA movie. Dwayne Johnson stars in this earthquake flick.

MAY 29TH
Splatoon
Nintendo's shooter swaps bullets for ink, but it's just as fast-paced and fun.

DIARY DATES

INTERFACE
May 14th
London, UK
www.interface.events

MAY

TOKYO INDIE FEST
May 8th
Tokyo, Japan
www.tokyoindiefest.com

CASUAL CONNECT ASIA
May 19th to 21st
Singapore
asia.casualconnect.org

NORDIC GAME
May 20th to 22nd
Malmö, Sweden
www.nordicgame.com

DIGITAL DRAGONS
May 21st
Kraków, Poland
www.digitaldragons.pl/en/

JUNE

THE DEVELOP QUIZ
June 10th
London
cnangle@nbmedia.com

E3
June 16th to 18th
Los Angeles, USA
www.e3expo.com

UNITE EUROPE
June 24th to 25th
Amsterdam, Netherlands
www.unity3d.com/events

BRAINS EDEN
June 26th to 29th
Cambridge, USA
www.brainseden.net

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

BRAINS EDEN 2015

BRAINS EDEN IS one of the UK's largest games festivals, providing students with guidance on starting their games development careers. Held at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, the event attracts aspiring games makers from all over Europe.

The central feature is a two-day game jam. The theme is revealed on Friday, June 26th to 150 aspiring games designers, split into 30 teams. These teams then have the weekend to create a new game from scratch, ready for judging on Monday, June 29th.

Friday will also see a selection of micro talks and careers clinics that will help students learn more about entering the industry.

Brains Eden has the support of several leading developers and other notable firms, including Guerrilla Cambridge, PlayStation First, ARM, Unity and Jagex. These companies will not only offer mentoring and advice, but also hear pitches from the teams about their games concepts.

"The organisers of Brains Eden are keen for games developers to join in as mentors or judges."

Monday, June 29th will see the students' work showcased for all attendees to see, culminating in an awards presentation.

The winner of the game jam will be awarded a freelance contract at Guerrilla Cambridge, with other prizes including five subscriptions to *Develop*, and five Unity Pro licences worth £1,000 each. The winning team in the Mobile category will be awarded five tablets.

The organisers are keen for devs to join in as mentors or judges. If you're interested, please contact **info@creativefront.org** or visit **www.brainseden.net.** ■

COMING SOON

DEVELOP #161
JUNE 2015

- Motion Capture special: We look at the latest advances in performance and facial capture
- Develop Jobs Extra: Your summer recruitment guide

DEVELOP #162
JULY 2015

- Mobile special: How to conquer smart devices
- Develop: Brighton 2015 preview
- Region Spotlight: Cambridge

For editorial enquiries, please contact jbatchelor@nbmedia.com
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Variable declarations

//COMMENT: BUSINESS

Understanding mobile games market saturation

New Develop columnist and SuperData CEO **Joost Van Duren** on changes in the mobile market

Smartphones and tablets can now be found in the hands of so many consumers that the hardware market is unlikely to see growth as dramatic as it has in the past few years. The software market needs to adapt accordingly

IT'S VERY DIFFICULT to measure the exact impact mobile gaming has had on the video games industry.

For one, it has changed the notion of what a gamer is – if that's even a thing anymore – by making the audience for games more diverse than ever. It is perhaps a bit easier to express its impact in terms of revenue, as mobile gaming totalled around $21bn in 2014 and is well on its way to reach $28bn by the end of next year. This makes it the largest games category and accounts for roughly a third of the $75bn worldwide market for interactive entertainment.

Unsurprisingly, the dominant narrative surrounding mobile games has focused largely on the ridiculous millions that successful and quasi-successful titles have earned. Initially, it was the ragtag generation of unemployed designers who suddenly found themselves printing money. Early apps like *iSteam* and *Trism* provided the evidence necessary for a growing number of people to quit their day jobs and focus exclusively on mobile game development.

Since then, the mobile games market has changed dramatically. Following the success of small devs, larger publishers like EA, Activision and Take-Two entered the market. At the same time, this new platform presented a unique opportunity for a host of social games developers, allowing a company like King to build on its experience and success. The entry of all these big players has changed the competitive environment: audiences expect higher quality games and marketing budgets have started to balloon.

So far, consumer demand has been healthy: in January the average paying mobile gamer in the UK spent £18.25 for a total of £56.4m. Now here's the important part: Between 2013 and 2014, the mobile games market in the UK grew around 12 per cent, from £487m to £546m.

But since then we have seen early signs of consumer spending reaching a plateau. More specifically, the average amount that people spend on mobile games is falling behind on the cost of production. This makes sense, since disposable income is not infinite and mobile games compete for attention and wallet share with other platforms, such as the new home consoles and various other forms of entertainment.

This raises the question: is the mobile games market showing signs of saturation?

SIZING UP YOUR AUDIENCE

Economists use the term 'market saturation' to describe a situation in which a product has become so common that most people who will buy it already have.

When looking at smartphone shipments, we see that the two major platforms – Android and iOS – are having record sales in terms of volume. But this is largely the result of Apple offering a more affordable version of the iPhone and the growing market share of Google's relatively cheap smartphone offerings.

In tandem, the sales of tablets have dropped from double digits year-over-year to a single digit forecast by industry watcher Garnet. This tells us that the bulk of people who would buy a mobile gaming device already has by now.

With hardware reaching saturation, it is important to note that these additional consumers are not the same as the high-spending early adopters from before. Now that mobile gaming has become a mainstream pastime, it is unreasonable to expect above-average spending.

Saturation, however, is not a bad thing. In fact, it indicates a change in market conditions. In response, mobile game firms will have to become more creative and spend more capital on building audiences. Now that the novelty has worn off for a lot of consumers, real competition begins.

Already the leaders in the space have raised the stakes with Supercell and Machine Zone spending big bucks on supermodels and SuperBowl ads. Companies that lack such budgets will, instead, look for more specific audiences and try to carve out a particular niche.

> ***"Now that mobile gaming has become mainstream, it is unreasonable to expect above-average spending."***

Finally, to stay with the market momentum a lot of mobile publishers have moved operations to Asia and, specifically, China. But entering this market is so easy. Consider this: currently one of the world's biggest publishers (Activision) is releasing one of the largest and most popular franchises (*Call of Duty*) in China, but it can't do so without the help of China's biggest distributor, Tencent. Even the big boys can't just roll in and claim market share.

Now that the mobile games market is maturing and starting to show signs of saturation, the stakes are raised. As competition intensifies and budgets balloon, the real question mobile devs confront is: what makes you think that you can be successful? The answer is and should be: let's find out. ■

Joost van Dreunen is co-founder and CEO of SuperData Research, provider of relevant market data and insight on digital games and playable media.
www.superdataresearch.com

//COMMENT: CHARITY

Raising awareness versus fundraising

PlayMob's **Nick Taylor** explains why charity partnerships are not just about raising money

OVER THE PAST year we've seen some fantastic charity campaigns in games through DLC, in-app purchases and via Twitch live streams. Gamers have helped raise millions of dollars and supported causes from planting trees to providing life-saving hospital equipment. Gaming is now an effective place to raises funds for your favourite causes.

Something that you're less likely to see inside of game these days is an awareness raising campaign, something that sets out to inform and educate players with helpful information about a cause or charity. For example, a charity like the Royal National Lifeboat Institution not only fundraises to provide life-saving assistance for anyone at sea in the UK but also try to educate everyone about the dangers of going out to sea unprepared.

At Playmob, we're known for our fundraising campaigns but we've also helped create awareness-raising ones as well. One of our most memorable involved educating players about rhino conservation and poaching using *RuneScape*. Players could answer a daily question about rhino conservation and after two questions answered correctly they would receive a white rhino in-game, and after seven a rare black rhino. Jagex also worked with United for Wildlife and their conservationists programme to put two young conservationists into the game.

The results were outstanding: over 57 per cent of *RuneScape's* daily players participated in the campaign and over 1.3m questions were answered. Players loved the campaign and some even signed up to support rhino charities.

A campaign like this has the chance to change and inform opinions on a huge scale. In campaigns involving cyberbullying quests, educating players actually saved lives. I'm not disregarding the work the games industry has done for charities, but I am encouraging developers to think about charities differently.

Games like *Journey* or *Never Alone* tell such personal stories of struggle that seem to resonate with the industry and thousands of charities out there hold the same stories. Be it Amnesty International, currently with the lack of light for over 80 per cent of Syria, or Oxfam, which shows children and families struggling for survival after disasters have hit. There are incredible stories and facts that developers could integrate into a game.

REAL-LIFE STORIES

Titles such as *Half the Sky Movement: The Game*, which sought to not only empower women throughout the world but also tell their stories in-game, are a shining example of how merging these stories with games can work.

Last year, in an effort to raise awareness of the situation of children in South Sudan, UNICEF embarked on a similar kind of campaign. They sent an actor, a film crew and two South Sudanese youths to a major video game convention in Washington, D.C., and were given a keynote address slot to pitch an exciting new video game. What the attendees didn't know was that the game idea revolved around a real story involving the two Sudanese refugees. It caused a storm, highlighting the harsh facts of their escape. Now imagine playing a game to its conclusion only to find out that everything you'd played had happened and your character was a real person. It provides a window into their life in a way that's not possible through any other medium.

I believe in the good that the games industry has done for charity over the years, but fundraising isn't the only option. Perhaps awareness and education could change more lives than a donation? ■

Games like Never Alone (main) tell tales of personal struggle, and charities hold similar real-life stories waiting to be told

Nick Taylor is the Operations Manager of Playmob, an organisation dedicated to helping connect games developers with charities and other causes.
www.playmob.com

//EXTRA CONTENT ONLINE

"You don't need 100 per cent presence to have an amazing and emotionally powerful time, no VR headset currently offers 100 per cent presence."

Virtual reality: Face-forward versus walk-around
Patrick O'Luanaigh, nDreams

"Even though the market is growing, it is becoming more and more difficult to get our games discovered and therefore actually played."

Publisher 3.0: The art of discovery
Andy Payne, Mastertronic

"Trying to hurry growth is the greatest mistake you can make. It is the most dangerous stage of entrepreneurship for a reason."

Survive, Sustain, Grow: The three stages of entrepreneurship
Taylor Bair, Marketing consultant

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SIDE EFFECTS SOFTWARE

FX GAME ART **PROCEDURAL** LEVEL DESIGNS

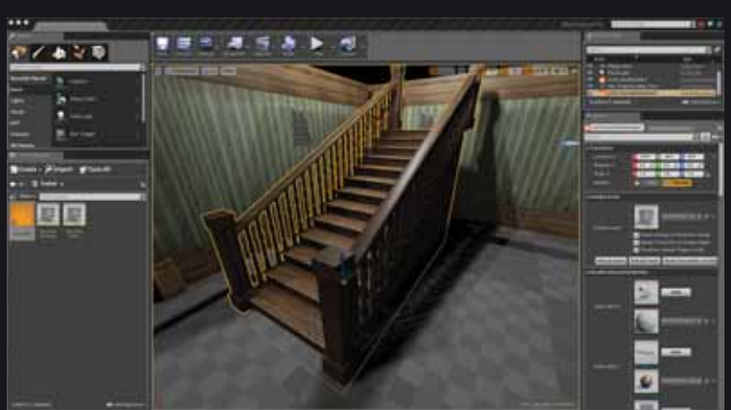
Houdini

Procedural Game Content gets a Boost with Houdini and Houdini Indie

Game makers and devs, like yourself, are being asked to **create more game content** while **achieving more realistic results** with tighter deadlines and shrinking resources. To handle the workload and keep focused on the creative process, you will want to **go procedural with Houdini.**

Procedural techniques make it easier to complete repetitive tasks and to generate more content faster while large studios can use it to distribute tasks more easily amongst artists and remote partners.

In addition, **HOUDINI INDIE** makes all of Houdini's tools, and the Houdini Engine plug-ins, available under a limited commercial license for only **$199 USD**.



Work with Houdini Digital Assets Inside Your Favorite Game Editor

In Houdini, networks of nodes can be easily wrapped up into Houdini Digital Assets then **shared with other artists**. With the Houdini Engine, these assets can be loaded into game editors such as **Unity® and UE4®*** or other applications such as **Autodesk® Maya,® Cinema 4D*** or **Autodesk®3DS Max.®***

Professional game studios use **Houdini Digital Assets** to **ensure consistency across a project.** The Houdini Engine puts these efficiencies into the hands of all artists which will **save your studio time and money**.

Studios can also build their own plug-in for in-house software using the compact **Houdini Engine API**. While not a run-time solution, the Houdini Engine will help you iterate faster than ever before.

* coming soon

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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

INDIGO PEARL
The PR agency on how developers can take advantage of DigitalXtra.net
P16

LOCALISATION
We talk to the experts about why ensuring quality translations is so important
P19

50 tips for marketing success

Making sure consumers notice your great game can be a significant challenge. **Craig Chapple** asks the experts how to get your game in front of the press, critics and players

GETTING YOUR GAME noticed in 2015 is more difficult than it's been in years.

Gone are the days where you could rock up on Steam or the App Store, bag some quick sales and become an overnight hit. Developers increasingly have to become more market savvy to get their game discovered. And unfortunately quality doesn't always speak for itself.

To help you become a success in this landscape crammed full with thousands of competitors, we've asked 18 industry professionals – from publishing to marketing and development roles – how best to get your game in the public eye, and get the coverage you need to be a success.

> ***"Gone are the days where you can rock up on Steam or the App Store and bag some quick sales and become an overnight hit."***

The following 50 tips cover: dealing with the press to ensure you're approaching the right publications and giving them all the relevant information they need; advice on getting your games discovered; how to use social media to promote your title; what to do when approaching YouTube and Twitch users; and other marketing strategies you can utilise to maximise game sales.

ID@Xbox's Agostino Simonetta and SCEE's Shahid Ahmad Ahmad also offer tips for getting noticed on PS4 and Xbox One.

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO HELP YOUR GAME GET DISCOVERED ON PSN

SCEE's director of Strategic Content Shahid Ahmad offers key advice on what to expect when launching your game for PS4 and Vita, and how to maximise your game's visibility.

1 The most obvious advice is to make a great game. That's your starting point. Everything is dependent on this.

2 If the game uses features that are unique to PlayStation, that will also help.

3 Building and maintaining good relations with your contacts at PlayStation can help, and that especially includes keeping us abreast of development and other news related to your game. If your game is considered Strategic Content, we will be supporting it in a number of ways, including – for the best titles – event exposure.

4 Work with us to talk about your game during development through our channels, like our blog and newsletter.

5 The most important thing to do is to ensure there is awareness around your game long before it's out on the PlayStation Store.

Steam and Apple's App Store have become awash of titles, making standing out crucial

SIX WAYS TO GET YOUR GAME DISCOVERED

Simon Byron, Publishing director, Curve Digital
Working with the platform holders during development is vital – keep them informed of your plans and ask for input in terms of release window and promotional opportunities. Whilst the platform holders are becoming increasingly overwhelmed, they are happy to help – providing you're not too pushy.

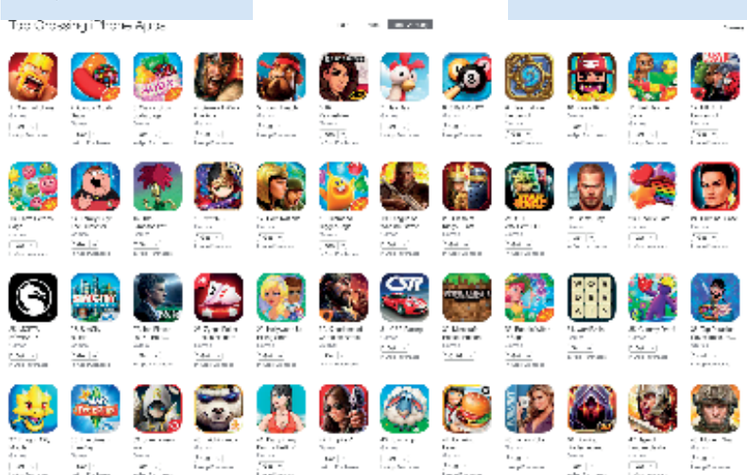
Joe Brammer, Producer, Deco Digital
If you're trying to get discovered on console, the best way is to make yourself incredibly easy to support. If you make sure you have a finished press kit and press release, it will be a lot less hassle for the big players like Microsoft to support you with placement and publicity.

Charlie Peachey, Head of marketing, Marmalade Technologies
It's a basic thing but many devs still ignore the golden rule of user testing before going live. Good things start with a good product, so make sure you get feedback and iron out any bugs and issues before you publish. A good user experience is more likely to result in recommendations and high ratings.

Jennifer Schneidereit, Co-founder, Nyamyam
Think about why your game would be a good fit for a certain platform. Every platform holder loves to feature games, that make them look good. When designing your game, think about your launch platform early and why it would be desirable for the platform holder to showcase it. It is like flirting with a stranger on the street: will they ask you on a date?

Bethany Aston, Senior PR executive, Team17
Make sure the platform or store team are aware of your game way before launch day. Get in as early as possible and make sure they know what makes your game fantastic and different to try and ensure store visibility.

Don Whiteford, Commercial director, Nomad Games
Get involved with 'Free App of The Day' programmes and volunteer your premium app. You get a spike of downloads and if you have a good monetisation strategy you will start to build a following for your game.



SIX WAYS TO GET YOUR GAME NOTICED ON XBOX

ID@Xbox third-party account manager Agostino Simonetta presents a selection of key tips to help your Xbox One game get in the public eye.

1. Engage with the Xbox community on social media to discuss your game.
2. Add a creative achievements list that players will want to share with their friends and on their activity feeds.
3. Host "Let's Play" Twitch streams and upload studio videos to show off the game to fans.
4. Create challenges to allow developers and the community to come together for special events.
5. Take your game to trade shows and events to meet the community and let them go hands-on.
6. And of course, come and talk to the ID@Xbox team if you have any specific ideas that we can help you with, such as partnering with Microsoft to show your game in our booth (or on stage) at events like GDC, Rezzed, Gamescom and E3.

TEN TIPS FOR DEALING WITH THE PRESS

Simon Byron, Publishing director, Curve Digital
Be wary of how you contact the press. Try more discrete modes of contact, be that email, phonecall or networking rather than calling them out for not covering something.

Jennifer Schneidereit, Co-founder, Nyamyam
Every game should have an easy to access press kit with current game info, art asset and links to trailers. Don't forget to keep updating it as your game evolves though. Don't hesitate to update the press kit every week, if you have to. If you are unfamiliar with them, have a look at presskit(). It is a free and easy-to-use template for video game press kits.

Michelle Turner, Global PR and marketing manager, Ripstone
Be nice – it's a relatively small industry, so always be friendly and helpful. People will appreciate this and remember it. Even if they can't help you at the moment or cover your game right now, they'll remember you when you next approach them. But don't get taken advantage of – there's lots of scammers out there trying to get free game codes.

Don Whiteford, Commercial director, Nomad Games
Be selective about your press. It's fatal to get your app in front of a reviewer who hates your genre or, if you have one, your licence. It's happened to us on more than one occasion. Do your research, and get professional help.

Steve Escalante, General manager, Versus Evil
Taking the time to reach out to Twitch, YouTube, and gaming personalities can impact your reach. But equally important with any kind of press is to make sure they would have an interest in your title. Basically don't ask an obvious first-person shooter fan to write about your platformer.

Charlie Czerkawski, Co-founder, Guerilla Tea
Network, and make press contacts. It'll give your work a much higher chance of being featured on a game site if you know the journalist personally.

Bethany Aston, Senior PR executive, Team17
It's vitally important to ensure media coverage is high-profile with key decision making media outlets and YouTube influencers/streamers. This will improve discoverability of customers being aware of your game and seeking it out on those store fronts.

James Deputy, Product manager, Kiss
When contacting the press, ensure your website is well laid out and all of the assets are easily available.

Joe Brammer, Producer, Deco Digital
Don't just use one point of contact. I usually Google, Facebook stalk, phone editors, and do everything I can to make sure people know that I will be sending them the press release momentarily. Don't just settle for news@megacorpgames.com, – everybody's using that email.

Sam Dalsimer, Senior PR manager, Tilting Point
Reach out a few weeks before release. Give the editor enough time to evaluate and review your game before it launches and schedule your review for publication. Don't expect them to have time available the week you launch.

FIVE TIPS TO GET YOUR GAME ON YOUTUBE AND TWITCH

TinyBuild Games talent scout and Develop: Brighton speaker Mike Rose on how to get your game covered by the big gaming personalities

1 First, get to know how these services really work. It might sound simple, but the intricacies of how YouTubers, Twitch streamers et al work, and how they differ, is really plain to see once you begin to watch lots of content that is in a similar vein to how you'd want to be covered. Twitch streamers, for example, are far more focused on interacting with their audiences, meaning that you'll want to give them reasons to use your games to build their communities. Spamming lots of YouTubers and Twitch streamers with your game, rather than learning exactly how they actually work and talking to them personally, is definitely not the way to go.

2 When you're contacting YouTubers and Twitch streamers about your game, make sure you're providing them with exactly what they need, as briefly as possible. YouTubers want a quick description of your game, a code or link to download the game for free, and a video or two of the game in action, so they can assess whether it's worth covering. Twitch streamers want the same thing, except they also want ways to use your game to interact with their audience, be it extra codes to give away to viewers, or an assurance that you'll tell your own fanbase when a livestreamer starts broadcasting your game.

3 Make sure your game actually records/streams properly. Go download all the most popular recording software, like Open Broadcaster Software, Bandicam, XSplit, Fraps and Dxtory, then make sure your game plays nicely with each. If a YouTuber or Twitch streamer is put off playing your game because of technical issues, that's pretty silly for you.

4 Talk to Twitch directly about marketing opportunities. Twitch is still pretty fresh and the team is still exploring how it can help games developers out. At tinyBuild, we've been working with the Twitch team to market some of our upcoming games, including featuring on the front page of Twitch, and it's working rather well.

5 Never get downheartened if you're barely getting any traction. Many YouTubers and Twitch streamers will only play very specific games and genres, and may simply pass over your game because it doesn't look like their kind of experience. Keep trying and hopefully you'll start seeing results.

SIX WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR YOUR GAME

Bethany Aston, Senior PR executive, Team17
Great trailers are really important and target the largest audience possible.

James Deputy, Product manager, Kiss
Be active on social media and promote yourself as well as your title. Be sure to partake in #screenshotsaturday on Twitter and Facebook.

Simon Byron, Publishing director, Curve Digital
Ensure your fans have a reason to follow you – think carefully about spamming them with praise you're getting elsewhere. If they're following you, they're already on board – don't come across as desperate by continually regurgitating coverage.

Don Whiteford, Commercial director, Nomad Games
Find like-minded developers that you can work with and agree to work together to share communication on social media. We do this with other Games Workshop licensees.

Charlie Cammack, Marketing executive, Legendary Games
Tweet other developers working on similar projects. If you're showing an interest in what they're doing, chances are you'll get a re-tweet and an engaging convocation. It also helps to build relationships with key industry people.

Steve Escalante, GM, Versus Evil
Social media is a conversation that gets uncomfortable when no one is talking, so make sure you reach out to your channels often and let them know you are not just posting stuff about your game, but are also responding to their comments and thoughts.

FIVE TIPS FOR UTILISING YOUR COMMUNITY IN MARKETING

Jedrzej Czarnota, doctoral research at Manchester Business School and Develop: Brighton speaker, discusses how you can use the community, and even trolls, to evangelise your game.

1. Greatest cause for deviant behaviour ('trolls') is customer-perceived procedural injustice – make sure that in the process of open-source marketing, the co-creative experience, as well as roles (of both studio and customers) are clearly articulated.
2. Provide incentives corresponding to various motivation and skill profiles present in your community, accounting for the stage in your game's development.
3. Gear your marketing department's processes towards absorption of inputs from your community: slack times and responsive, cross-disciplinary teams.
4. Technoliberalism: adjust your organisational culture to one recognising customers as legitimate collaborators; simultaneously games developers should also accept their role as curators of external content.
5. Establish task structure for your co-creating customers that allows for self-selection and modularity.

SEVEN MARKETING STRATEGIES

Joe Brammer, Producer, Deco Digital

The internet is full of information. If you just slowly post work in progress images to the internet, the images will just be more information on the internet. Have a strategy and try and make big announcements instead of lots of little ones – that's how you'll get picked up by large games networks.

Charlie Czerkawski, Co-founder, Guerilla Tea

It's never too early to start talking about your game. Announce what you're working on, and keep sharing updates as development progresses. Don't wait until you're approaching release to start trying to promote the game, be it via social media or talking to the games press.

Michelle Turner, Global PR and marketing manager, Ripstone

Make sure you understand the selling points of your game and know your audience. Whether you're talking to press, or networking, or showing the game to the public at an event – you need to know the hook. This might be different depending on who you're talking to and the language you use may need to be different for each.

Paul Kilduff-Taylor, Joint MD, Mode 7 Games

Players fundamentally want to be able to do cool stuff. That sounds asinine but it's so easy to forget: concentrating on showing that your game has a great art style, cool systems, or an interesting story can be the wrong approach. You need your marketing to focus very quickly on what the player is going to be doing.

Shahid Ahmad, Director of strategic content, SCEE

There are features and there are benefits. The former will facilitate the latter. You are in the business of creating work that gets transmuted to human experience via player agency. If you understand how your game might make a person feel, you are at the starting point of creating a powerful marketing message.

Darren Williams, Marketing director, Havok

Your game's public image has to be meaningfully different and consistently stated. Choice now is overwhelming, so indies especially should embrace their advantages of agility, experimentation and bravery. However, don't crave 'uniqueness'. Unique becomes esoteric quickly.

Steve Escalante, General manager, Versus Evil

As a development team you should take a step back and look at what your timeline looks like, when you are going to have the game playable, when press can get hands-on, when consumers can get hands-on, if there are events you can attend, and if you need to produce anything for pre-order/retail launch.

Giving you **Xtra**

Indigo Pearl unveils its new DigitalXtra.net service, which helps developers distribute digital game codes efficiently and professionally

The Indigo Pearl team includes Olly McGowan (left), Alex Girling (middle) and Caroline Miller (right), who aim to help developers get their games noticed in the press

ONE OF THE best ways to get the gaming press – be that traditional or enthusiast – to pay more attention to your game is to let them play it. Previews, reviews, Let's Play videos and livestreams all depend on this.

The issue is that, with so many outlets now considering themselves part of the gaming press – from the long-running websites and magazines to new video channels – there are countless journalists to be sending your game to; something that can be a time-consuming process.

The rise of digital games on mobile, console and PC has made this easier for today's new and smaller developers, but you still need the right channels through which to distribute your code.

CONDUIT OF CODE

One option is a PR agency such as Indigo Pearl, which has worked with Devolver, Bossa Studios, Positech Games and one-man success story Mike Bithell. But even the agency recognises that this might not be plausible for some devs.

"We realised quickly that while a lot of indies couldn't afford to hire a PR agency, they still needed to get their code into the hands of the press, influencers and community to give them the best chance at discovery," explains director Caroline Miller.

Indigo Pearl's solution is DigitalXtra.net. The comapny started life as a traditional PR agency back in 2000. While known for its agency work, the firm is also responsible for PressXtra.net – a department that builds and manages press websites for some of the world's biggest publishers.

The system has been recently rebuilt, and it was during this that the team identified an opportunity that would help scores of developers.

"As part of the rolling development of PressXtra.net, we identified that a real problem that needed resolving was the delivery of digital code," Miller says.

"Our clients on both sides of the business were totally frustrated with the antiquated method of code distribution, which meant the company's monetary asset – the digital code – was to be sent out using an inefficient, unsecure and time-consuming process, which saw many PRs copy and pasting codes from a spreadsheet into an email.

"So we went back to our developers and worked closely with them to build what we call the DigitalXtra.net. We digitised the process to marry the press contacts with the digital codes in one automated process."

The team at Indigo Pearl also tailored the system to generate full-colour HTML emails. Not only does this look more eye-catching to the games press, it also allows indie developers to include a digital press kit to give journalists all the information they need about new games.

"This is by no means a faceless tool," Miller assures. "The most common factor of a recipient reading your email is who it is from. Our system allows you to distribute your digital codes from you, giving that much-needed personal PR touch.

"On distributing your codes, the site will build itself a bespoke archive account for each and every journalist on your mailing list, so they have an online hub of all your digital codes available to them at all times."

MEET THE TEAM

Indigo Pearl will be attending Interface – the new games industry event from the teams behind *Develop* and *MCV* – to share more about the new system. And Miller is keen to meet with studios to gather their thoughts on the new service.

"We want to talk to developers about the challenges they face getting their games discovered in a crowded and noisy market," she says. "And to see how DigitalXtra.net fits into their requirements.

"We thought Interface provided the perfect opportunity to get face-to-face with the people we want to work with, and discuss how our systems – combined with our PR expertise – can help even the smallest budget get a global release."

Interface takes place on May 14th at the Candid Arts Trust near Angel in London. Find out more at **www.interface.events**. ■

COMING SOON

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Language barriers

Games have increased in scale and are regularly updated and released to multiple territories across the globe, particularly on mobile. **Craig Chapple** asks how developers can prepare for the work ahead and improve their title's chances overseas

THE WORK OF localisation specialists often goes unnoticed when everything is done right – from the well-translated text to the quality of the voiceover work. But when it goes wrong, it can be jarringly noticeable.

As games increase in scope, and more are released in a variety of markets across the globe, good localisation is arguably more important than ever, particularly if studios want to take advantage of the growing Asian markets, and especially if you're in free-to-play.

But is this key aspect of a game's production given enough attention, money and time?

THE FIRST WORD

"It really depends on the project," says Binari Sonori co-founder Fabio Minazzi, a company now part of Keywords Studios after its acquisition last year.

"We observe a very wide range of approaches that depend on the experience and proficiency in localisation of the studio or publisher. Traditionally developers considered localisation an activity to be taken care towards the end of the project. Localisation management used to be low-ranked and not very strategic in a development team, if at all present.

"With simship and digital distribution taking over, there's obviously more consciousness of the importance of international sales to reach success, so engagement happens at an earlier stage. A real localisation producer role is emerging in bigger teams: among their tasks, the producer needs to bring the localisation topics to the game design table, harmonising the different needs that appear during the game lifecycle."

Universally Speaking business development executive James Hull says these days the team is often brought in at an early stage, which ensures time for setting up the correct teams, referencing, and allowing them time to familiarise themselves with the game, text and language. But it doesn't always go smoothly.

> ***"Traditionally, developers considered localisation an end-of-project activity."***
>
> Fabio Minazzi, Binari Sonari

"We also see the other extreme, where developers view localisation as necessary, but remember at the last minute or put it off for as long as possible. This has an adverse effect on the quality of translation," he states.

LocalizeDirect business development director Michael Souto says that in his experience, many developers still leave localisation until the end. Early warning gives localisation firms time to plan out a strategy and offer insight to developers on issues that may not have been taken into account but could be important to the process.

"If there is dialogue, has the developer thought about providing info on who is saying the line and who it is delivered to?" asks Souto.

"Has the developer thought about max text length? Is the source text already snug so translations will be overlong? How are they dealing with gender? If there is a choice of male or female player then is there flexibility to manage gender specific instances? Are the various platform-specific strings split out and clearly marked?"

NO SMALL TALK

Considering localising your game early can be doubly important when considering how long translation work may take – particularly if other services such as voice acting are required. Leaving this too late could result in unreasonable deadlines, and ultimately, a lower quality product for select markets.

Minazzi says the typical duration for localising a title with a handful of words to be translated can take two weeks, which includes translation, implementation and testing. For bigger projects, this can be much longer.

He explains how Binari Sonori has worked on projects that required localisation into nearly 40 languages simultaneously, including translation, audio and language testing. Its work on *Fable III* required six linguists per language and was recorded with a cast of 50 actors per language, in eight dialects over a period of five months.

"A triple-A game is usually translated, dubbed and tested in four to eight months.

Above: Binari Sonari's Fabio Minazzi says that localisation should be considered early on in a game's development

Main: It's important to consider how long translation will take, particularly on games that require other services such as voice acting

Universally Speaking's James Hull (top) and LocalizeDirect Michael Souto (above)

Left: Agencies often charge developers on a per-word basis when it comes to localisation, but the process can be slow if you're pushing for quality

Below: Lionhead's Fable III required six linguists and 50 voice actors per language to localise into its eight dialects. The process took five months.

For those games that are run as a service, for example MMOs and social titles, localisation happens in iterations, like development," he says. "Usually there are updates every two weeks or on a monthly basis and localisation occurs in the same timeframes."

Hull adds that Universally Speaking has worked on thousands of tiles, including one project that took two years to complete with multiple teams in a plethora of languages, amounting to millions of words.

Despite the length of these projects, Hull explains that it's important developers remember most agencies work on a per-word basis, not on duration.

> ***"Localisation as a skillset is creative, and not straight-forward in measuring productivity."***
>
> James Hull, Universally Speaking

"The main reason for a per-word basis, is you only pay for what you need. Each request is different and very game-specific," he explains. "Localisation as a skillset is creative and therefore not straight-forward in measuring productivity."

LOST IN TRANSLATION

As well as considering localisation early on, a number of other significant challenges remain that require careful planning to ensure a smooth workflow. Souto says process is the biggest difficulty, as even a game with a small word count can lead to time wasted on tracking strings and changes, especially if they are translated into ten or more languages.

"If you don't have an easy-to-manage process then you are going to have a nightmare, that's pretty much guaranteed," he says. "Then consider that most games are no longer a case of 'ship it and work on the sequel'. There is additional text for updates, and DLC. How are these all managed?"

Souto also stresses the importance of sentence structure. He says many developers have a rigid structure, such as 'Select Dave and fight in the car wash', for which the string for translation may be 'Select %1 and fight in the %1'.

"Ignoring the fact that in many instances we aren't told what %1 can be replaced by – which is a nightmare – we have another two issues," he explains.

"Translations may need the character variable to follow the location variable. However. we have encountered on many occasions that the order of the variables must stay as per source. This leads to super clunky localisation and what the player will view as machine translation, even though it's not.

"What if either of these variables is replaced with something that has a gender consideration? If we can see these earlier we can potentially point these out."

Minazzi says the two biggest challenges of localising games for a variety of languages and territories are speed and quality. Swiftness in particular, he says, can be difficult, particularly when considering that teams are often dispersed to ensure the right language coverage, flexibility and quality.

"In exporting games to and from Asia there is also a cultural dimension to be accounted for," he states. "On a macro scale East-West cultural adaptation has a major impact compared with publishing in one region only.

"On a smaller scale the challenge is the level of adaptation to each individual locale, which can be pretty subtle nowadays: taking into account country-specific cultural references – such as literature, movies, pop culture, politics – requires lots of care for details."

It's clear that, even with a smaller game, but especially large and regularly updated titles, localisation work needs to be carefully considered during production to ensure a smooth workflow and a quality experience for players across the globe. Without planning early, a graphically and mechanically polished title could still have the player's experience tarnished by poor translation work.

As Hull says: "This is still the number one challenge both for the cost in a single project or in creating a scalable business for the future. If you think about localisation early, challenges such as preparing the title for multilingual support, tools and file formatting can all be addressed, leading to a much more efficient workflow." ■

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Graduate Engineers

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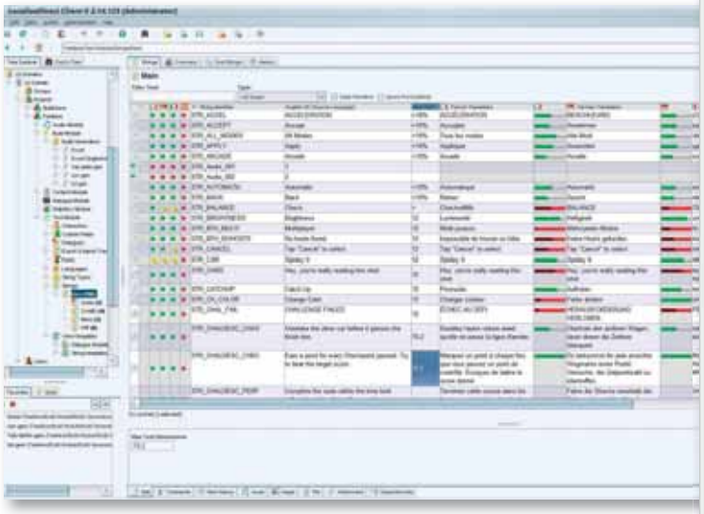
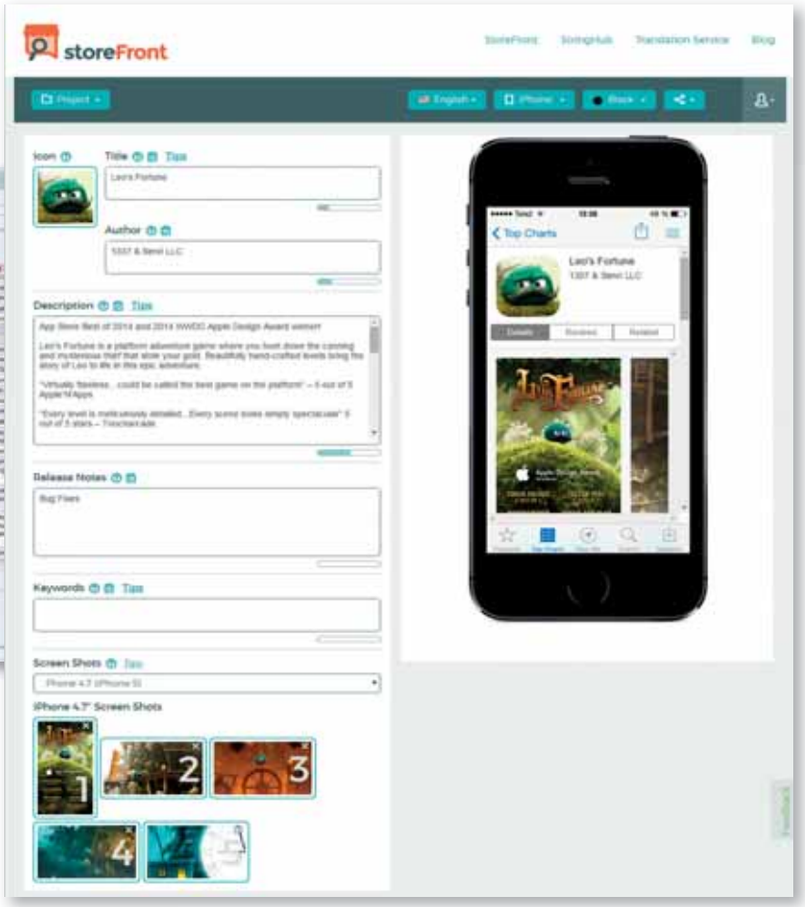
Taking your game global: Should it be so troublesome?

Increasing the number of global users playing your game is the best way to increase revenue. But does the localisation process need to be so damned tricky to manage?





LocalizeDirect created StoreFront and LocDirect following their frustration with current localisation tools

THE TEAM AT LocalizeDirect all used to make games, so they're perfectly placed to understand the pitfalls when localising for foreign markets. Their increasing frustration with the lack of localisation process tools that did exactly what they wanted, led to them developing systems to combat these woes.

STOREFRONT

StoreFront was released mid-2014 and has been developed to remove the hassle of localising App Store pages. Localising these is a clear way to push awareness of your game. But the number of languages makes this tricky to manage, especially when there are multiple updates in lots of languages.

One of the key features is previewing your App Store page on different iOS devices, in each language. StoreFront also features a translation memory, so if the bulk of your text is the same and you only update a line or two, the existing text will be retained and only changes will be translated.

You can share this through the app to receive feedback. Now you submit through Connect and hope for the best. There's no way to know if it is formatted correctly and if the translated text has caused alignment issues resulting in a page that looks unprofessional.

StoreFront is free to use so there's every reason to try it out.

LOCDIRECT

Have you experienced overlong strings, change control, translator queries? If not, then you probably haven't localised. As more and more companies experience the pain of loc string management, the demand for a solid process will increase. One issue is the perceived lack of cost of working in traditional offline files like Excel. Using a spreadsheet is 'free', but how 'free' is it? How much time is spent managing the files, making sure changes are reflected and sent for translation?

Since its launch in 2010, LocDirect has been a popular choice when it comes to managing localisation. LocDirect manages source strings and logs all action taken, on a per string level. So you can see what changes were made and who made them.

At any point, you can export a file in the format most suitable for your needs. This is useful if you just want to run some tests using translated text before final delivery.

Now back to time saving specifics. The vast majority of bugs found during localisation QA are overlong strings. LocDirect allows you to specify a maximum character length per string. This dramatically reduces the number of bugs and if done correctly should really result in zero instances.

There is also an API solution. When set up, any changes made to source and translations are refreshed and imported into your code on the fly. This further reduces the update and test time required.

LocalizeDirect offers a translation service through an extensive network of professional game translators. Although you can alternatively license LocDirect and give your preferred translation partner access to your projects.

If you're still not sure whether you should localise or want some tips on how best to do this, then check out the LD blogs found here: **localizedirect.com/pages/posts**.

LocalizeDirect will be at the Nordic Game show in May. If you would like to set up a meeting to discuss your loc woes, email: **ms@localizedirect.com**.

You can find out more about LocalizeDirect and its services at **www.localizedirect.com**. ■

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The OneSky Guide to the World

The localisation specialist offers insight into conquering the globe's key territories

Above: OneSky's Patrick Yip (above) says there's more to localisation than languages and translation – you also have to take into account cultural difference

Badland (right) and QuizUp (below) are just two of the many games OneSky has localised for other regions

LAUNCHING A GAME in your home territory is tough enough, but taking on regions you're less familiar with can be an even more daunting prospect.

The key is understanding the barriers you face, and Patrick Yip, growth manager at OneSky, has compiled the following advice for tailoring your game to some of the world's biggest markets.

EAST ASIA

CHINA, JAPAN AND Korea have grown in importance recently due to their huge market size, but tapping these markets is very difficult.

East Asian languages are very different from English. Most sentences are short strings of square-shaped characters. As a result, sentences in these languages occupy screen-space very differently from text in English. You'll need to make sure your interface can accommodate that change.

Also, the writing style is different. English writing prefers plain style, but that doesn't work in languages like Japanese. Japanese writing prefers more elaborated forms of expression. Idiom and some formulaic expressions are welcome. Instruct translators clearly, and provide more contexts for the original text.

Localisation doesn't end with translation. Visual items can be a serious concern. East Asian gamers prefer Japanese-looking art, but hesitate about Western art. You may need to adjust the style of your game in order to have great success in East Asia.

Partnering with a local design house could be an option. For instance, *Puzzle Trooper* had some manga makeovers before its launch in Asia. If the visual style received good response in East Asia, it probably works in other Asian regions such as Southeast Asia.

Distribution could be challenging. For instance, China's Android app market is highly segmented. There are more than 200 third-party app marketplaces, while Google Play is not a major player.

Integrating to messaging apps can work, both as a distribution channel and retention strategy. The Chinese use Weibo and WeChat, while the Japanese and Koreans are addicted to Line.

SOUTH AMERICA

EXPECTED TO BE the highest-growing mobile games market, South America has huge opportunities for games developers.

First, you should be even more careful about the languages. Latin America – known as LATAM – speaks Portuguese and Spanish, but these are not the same as their European counterparts.

Some translators or agencies will propose that you translate your game into a 'neutral' form of Spanish or Portuguese, in order to save money. We *strongly* recommend against this. 'Neutral Portuguese' or 'neutral Spanish' doesn't really exist, and doesn't reflect real-world experiences. You need to hire native translators from South America. And make sure you choose the right form of Portuguese or Spanish when submitting your app description to the local iOS and Google Play store.

You should also be aware that South America is, mostly, in the southern hemisphere, so the seasons are different. Christmas is hot. A school vacation in July can get pretty chilly. Keep an eye on references to weather or seasons in your game. It helps to ask your translator to pay special attention to climate-related content.

In addition to overcoming challenges in translation, you should also take a look at your mobile game's spec requirement. LATAM is dominant with entry-level Android devices. Take Brazil for instance: according to Kantar Worldpanel, as of August 2014, Android controlled almost 90 per cent of the domestic smartphone operating system market. Therefore, not all of these smartphones can handle high-end games. Downgrading your game will help it run more smoothly on these devices. So will hosting a different APK file for the LATAM market.

EUROPE

IN THE EUROPEAN market, the challenge lies in the linguistic diversity. There are 24 official languages of the EU, while Switzerland alone has four. Each has its own grammar and character system.

Your game's source code must do internationalisation very well. Apart from extracting your strings from the source code, you must ensure that the infrastructure is compatible with various grammar rules in European languages.

Grammatical gender and plurality is a common issue. German has three forms of gender, Polish four forms of plurality. You may need to refer to the Unicode standard and structure your code accordingly.

To bring your game to Europe, you have to work with a couple of translators. Forget about email and spreadsheet. Use a translation management system to automate the localisation workflow and smoothen the communication process.

In general, give flexibility to translators to adjust content for the target market. Allow them to bring their own creativity and communicate with them closely.

OneSky provides a platform for apps and games like *HonorBound*, *QuizUp* and *Badland* to order and manage professional translations in 40+ languages. **www.oneskyapp.com**

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#DEVELOPJOBS

Your monthly guide to the best career opportunities in games development worldwide

MOVERS AND SHAKERS
Dovetail Games' latest hires bring the studio's headcount up to 100
P28

RECRUITER HOT SEAT
Codemasters' Nikki Tutt on the racing studio's recruitment needs
P29

SKILLS AND TRAINING
Digital Tutors' Kyle Green discusses its video training content
P31

Playtonic Games seeks young talent

Rare was a big part of the childhood of many a gamer, creating classics like Banjo-Kazooie. Now six of the developer's alumni have formed a new studio called Playtonic Games – and the firm is on the look out for the next generation of talent

by Alex Calvin

EARLIER THIS YEAR, a group of six former Rare developers banded together to create a new studio called Playtonic.

When the team's existence was revealed to the world, it was also announced that it was working on a game currently known as *Project Ukelele*, a 'spiritual successor' to classic platformer *Banjo-Kazooie*.

And this move from a triple-A studio to an indie has been something of a change of pace for the team.

"The biggest challenges are on the non-game development side of things," studio head Gavin Price (*above*) tells *Develop*. "We're trying to stay on top of all the other things. Triple-A devs have so many people to look after that stuff, but here we have to do our own business management and upkeep as well and work on the game. Development-wise, it's very similar to how it used to be at Rare during the N64 era. It's just like the old days."

After their fans welcomed the announcement of *Project Ukelele* with open arms, and many saying they would fund the game, Playtonic's plans have escalated, and are now bigger in scope.

"After our Kickstarter is finished in June time, we'll be looking to hire more people in art and programming, and possibly design as well," Price says.

> ***"We want to do our bit for the young bloods straight out of university."***
>
> Gavin Price, Playtonic

"We're still going to be a small team, but we want to grow to around 12. Potentially we'll be using people on contract as well for more specific tasks. In the long term, once the first game is done, we want to start a second team, so we can have a nice stream of releases. One game can be announced, the other can be developed in secret, and so on."

And while it's common for start-up studios to hire more experienced staff early to speed up the growth process, Playtonic is setting its sights on younger developers.

"We want to do our bit for the young bloods from university. People who are really eager and haven't got a position in the industry," Price says.

"We're looking for individuals who very much have the same creative approach as us. We want to get them early before they end up in the hands of some triple-A developer. When you get your first job in the industry it sets you on a path. We want to get people started on a similar route to us. But we're not going to be turning away experienced people – it's going to be the right person for the right job."

That's not the only way in which Playtonic's hiring process differs from other studios.

Price explains: "When hiring, our approach is pretty much the opposite of a large company; they hire to fill specialised roles, whereas we're on the lookout for the type of dev that wants to be responsible for multiple areas of a game and focus on making game content within a team with a varied work list." ■

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

This month: Dovetail Games, Playrise Digital, Climax Studios, GameGenetics and Carbon

DOVETAIL GAMES HIRES 100TH EMPLOYEE

DOVETAIL GAMES UK-based simulation specialist has added two new additions to its ranks, bringing its headcount up to 100.

CHRIS APPLEGARTH joins as programmer, while fellow newcomer **ESTELLE TIMOTHY** (*right*) takes on the role of licensing manager.

With five years of experience, Applegarth joins from *Championship Manager* and *Football Kicks* studio Distinctive Developments. He will work with the team behind Dovetail's upcoming flight simulation products, built on the technology that powered Microsoft's iconic *Flight Simulator X*.

Meanwhile, Timothy has spent the past nine years as a project manager within local governments working on European projects to drive the use of technology in small businesses.

She will be responsible for ensuring all locomotives, planes and fishing equipment in Dovetail's games are fully licensed.

"These hires represent a huge milestone in the story of Dovetail Games and go to show how far we've come in a relatively short period of time," said VP of HR Gemma Johnson-Brown. "We are going from strength to strength and a number of our recent hires have shown this.

"When I first started here in 2012, the 100th employee seemed a long way off and it fills me with pride to think that we've got here and are still looking to expand rapidly.

"I am looking forward to continuing to grow Dovetail Games and taking on the next 100 employees." ■

PLAYRISE DIGITAL

Indie Playrise Digital has hired BAFTA-award winning audio producer **GUY COCKCROFT** to its development team.

Cockcroft joins as audio director for the upcoming PS4 title *Table Top Racing: World Tour*. At his company Red Button Audio, Cockcroft has worked on a number of indie titles, including Roll7's *OlliOlli*, *OlliOlli2* and *Not a Hero*.

"It's fantastic to get Guy involved on *World Tour*," said Nick Burcombe, CEO of Playrise. "He's highly experienced across a range of platforms and his contribution in helping the team at Roll7 win their BAFTA makes it all the more exciting for us." ■

CLIMAX STUDIOS

The firm has hired **JOSH TARRANT** as business development manager.

Tarrant comes to the studio having working at the likes of Jagex as senior community manager and EA where he served as engagement marketing manager.

"We're delighted to have Josh join us here at Climax," said Climax CEO Simon Gardner. "We've been looking for quite some time now to secure the right individual for the role of business development manager as this position requires a wide and varied skill set. We feel that with his background, social media skills and previous work experience, Josh is an ideal fit." ■

GAMEGENETICS

Former Sony Europe vice president **JEFFRY VAN EDE** has taken up a new role as CEO of the free-to-play and online user acquisition firm.

Van Ede has worked as interim CEO since the start of 2015 following former boss and founder **ALEXANDER PIUTTI**'s decision to step down from the role. Van Ede worked at Sony for nine years, starting as director of finance and operations for the Benelux division in 2003. He became VP of Sony Europe in 2006 and went on to be MD of Sony Germany in January 2008. ■

CARBON DIGITAL The MediaCity-based video effects specialist has hired **JACQUI KANE** (*right*) as producer.

Kane joins with 30 years of senior management experience having worked at her own construction company, Salford-based E and J Kane.

The video effects company has also hired **CARLEEN HOUBART** (*above*) as visual effects artist.

Houbart's career to date has included stints at the likes of Sumo Digital, Traveller's Tales and Sony Liverpool.

THIS IS WHERE WE WORK

Opening the doors to studios around the world

PARADOX INTERACTIVE

Stockholm, Sweden
www.paradoxplaza.com

Paradox Studio's Stockholm office has been a leading developer of globally renowned, PC-focused strategy games since 1995. The studio is in a tall office tower overlooking the city, making it "perfectly positioned to watch for approaching invasions". The team speaks 25 languages and, in the event of a zombie outbreak, the office's internal wiki hosts a detailed zombie survival guide.

RECRUITER HOT SEAT

Codemasters recruitment resource lead Nikki Tutt tells us how applicants can impress the racing studio

Company: Codemasters
Country: United Kingdom
Hiring: Entry, experienced, senior and principal level programmers (especially graphics), principal games designer
Where to apply: recruitment@codemasters.com

What differentiates your studio from other developers?
Our studios are full of people who grew up playing Codemasters titles, especially the *Rally*, *Dirt*, *Toca* and *Grid* games, and it was their passion that led them to pursue gaming as a career. For many people here, they now have their ideal job working the game series that they grew up playing.

We're also one of the largest game developers in the UK with some 300 people at our Warwickshire campus and another 100 in Birmingham, which makes for an amazing pool of talent and expertise to collaborate and knowledge share with.

We have a diverse range of teams of different sizes, working on everything from our central technology initiatives, to innovative digital titles and triple-A big-brand blockbusters. With Codemasters' internal diversity, you can be a generalist in a small, focused digital team for one project and a specialist in a more extensive team for the next.

How many staff are you looking to take on?
We're recruiting for a variety of development talent for positions at both our Warwickshire campus and our central Birmingham studio. We're particularly interested in hearing from programmers at all levels, especially those who are graphic specialists. We're listing and detailing the openings on our social media feeds, such as Codemasters Jobs on Facebook.

What perks are available to working at your studio?
Everyone at Codemasters can enjoy the benefit of working flexi-time to suit their lifestyle. We have an onsite canteen and we also provide a free transport service between Leamington Spa and our Warwickshire campus, alongside a large number of free car parking spaces for those who drive or bike to work. The Warwickshire campus is situated in wonderful rural surroundings, where staff can take advantage of going for long walks or playing sports in the surrounding fields, while our Birmingham studio is close to the city's renewed entertainment district.

What should aspiring devs do with their CV to get an interview?
Keep your information succinct, relevant and honest – there's no need for a CV to be more than two pages as those who initially review your CV are busy people. Think of them as already having CV fatigue and so convey your experience and abilities in a compact and credible way – it all helps to make that first impression work for you. Detail your most relevant skillsets for the position, demonstrate your passion for the gaming industry and it's important to show your personality as those reviewing your CV want someone who's a good fit for the team.

Who is the best interviewee you have ever had and how did they impress you?
The best interviewees are those who have done their research, have a genuine passion for the industry, are excited about the projects the company is working on and can show how this, along with their skillset and experience, will make them a benefit to our organisation.

What advice would you give for a successful interview at your studio?
We are always looking for people who have a genuine interest in the projects the studio is working on and can show us what their skillset, experience and personality can bring to the team. Do your best to relax and be yourself – we're looking for people who will truly fit in with our team styles. If your CV has accurately detailed your skillsets and accomplishments, there's a good chance you already have what we're looking for and the interview process is more about getting to know you.

> ***"The best interviewees are those who have a passion for the industry."***
> Nikki Tutt, Codemasters

If you have recruited internationally, what is the process like?
The process is quite straightforward for both us and the candidate. We begin with a Skype conversation, which is an opportunity for both sides to ask preliminary questions as we appreciate that most overseas candidates will want to know more about what's on offer in terms of the position and the area they may be moving to, and we like to talk through their experience at a personal level.

We will then invite the candidate to our studios to get a feel for the company, the team and the area they will be moving to. It's a chance for both sides to see if the candidate will enjoy the work and personally fit the studio culture. We provide the candidate with information on the process of applying for a visa if required, finding accommodation nearby, the area's amenities and, for those bringing families to the area, we'll talk to them about local schools and jobs for partners.

How have your recruitment needs change at your studio?
Our recruitment needs do vary between the teams and the studios and are specific to the various projects we're staffing. We always look to fill our studios with people who can bring that extra knowledge, experience and skillset to the team.

Why should developers join you when indie and self-publishing have become so much more accessible?
There's so much variety and scale in the development projects at Codemasters that if you're looking to be part of something that has traditionally been considered 'indie', we'll likely have something in the pipeline that will appeal.

We also have the opportunities to suit the way in which any candidate would like to work; from short turnaround projects on smart devices to being part of the larger production teams, such as *F1*, for console and PC.

While we're already a sizable operation in the games business, we're backed by one of the world's largest players in the entertainment business – our principal shareholder is Reliance Entertainment ADA, the games, movies and music conglomerate. ■

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GET THAT JOB

Development specialists offer advice on how you can bag that career help

THIS MONTH: PRODUCER, WITH CURVE DIGITAL'S SOPHIE ROSSETTI

What qualifications and/or experience do you need?
At least a few years' industry experience, either working your way up as a production assistant, or in another relevant field where you took on management responsibilities.

Some of our producers in the past have begun in QA, some in design, and some pursued production straight out of university. A degree is not essential, but it does show you've learnt essential skills such as working well in groups, writing clearly and concisely, and meeting deadlines.

How would someone come to be in your position?
Show an interest for how all the elements of a game team come together. Apply your leadership qualities. Shadow a producer. It's not just about becoming an expert in your current discipline and then moving over to management – you need to want to be a manager first.

Communication is key. So, if you find yourself being the 'glue' that keeps a team connected, or the person who helps conversations to flow better, you are already helping the production department immensely and should probably see where that can take you.

> ***"If spreadsheets and forms are your passion, we already love you."***
>
> Sophie Rossetti, Curve

If you were interviewing someone, what do you look for?
Someone who can lead by example. The subtle way they hold themselves and handle the group dynamic of an interview setting needs to shine through. In recent interviews, we've been looking mostly at personality over paper qualifications.

An understanding of the unique challenges faced in cross-platform development is essential. And if spreadsheets and forms are your passion, we already love you.

What opportunities are there for career progression?
There are plenty of ways you can move up if you're a great producer. With enough experience, it is one of the best positions to be trained in if you ever choose to open your own studio, too.

You may also find yourself becoming more public-facing as your career progresses. You should find you have more opportunities to represent your organisation and be present in the industry at trade shows and in conversations with the press. ■

If you've got job advice to share, email **acalvin@nbmedia.com**

Employee HOT SEAT

Studio Gobo lead designer Xu Xiaojun discusses what it is like working for the Disney Infinity developer

What do you do at the studio?
I work as the lead designer on our currently unannounced project.

How did you get your current job?
I was offered the opportunity when Studio Gobo was building up the team for the *Disney Infinity: Pirates of the Caribbean* playset.

I was very excited by what they had been making and agreed to join straight away.

What perks are available to those working at the studio?
There is always lots of fresh fruits, cakes, chocolates in the office, as well as a fridge loaded with all kinds of wonderful craft beers.

We also do team lunch every Friday, and there are free gym memberships, health insurance, childcare vouchers, flexible hours and regular social events. It's awesome being so near the beach and in the vibrant city of Brighton, too.

The studio also has a budget for sending people to conferences like GDC and Siggraph every year.

> ***"Sometimes we ask candidates to do a test before moving onto the interview stage."***
>
> Xu Xiaojun, Studio Gobo

What is the recruitment process like at your studio?
It's not too dissimilar to most game studios.

We select a shortlist of candidates from all the CVs we have received.

Depending on the roles, sometimes we ask them to do a test before moving onto the interview stage.

We consider candidates from all over the world and very often have Skype interviews, and then invite the candidates for an onsite interview before a decision is made.

What was your own interview like?
I got invited to the office and shown the project.

Most of the team were ex-colleagues from Blackrock, and we had been working with each other for years, so there's a lot of trust.

It's not like a formal interview, it feels more like catching up with old friends.

Describe the atmosphere at your studio.
It's a very open and relaxing working environment, with lots of toys, models, books and comics.

It feels more like a place for playing instead of working.

We all sit down and have lunch together on Friday; the whole team feels like a big family, we trust and look after each other. ■

Name: Xu Xiaojun
Title: Lead designer
Company: Studio Gobo

SKILLS AND TRAINING

This month: Digital Tutors

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DIGITAL TUTORS PROVIDES a huge library of more than 2,000 video-based courses teaching developers new skills, workflows, techniques and how to use various software.

Its video content covers areas such as 3D animation, VFX, web games and design. A further 2,000 videos have also been made available following its acquisition by Pluralsight, offering lessons in development and IT.

"We want to help developing creatives get in the industry and help professionals keep pushing their skills so they can further their careers," says Digital Tutors director of creative content Kyle Green (*pictured right*).

> ***"We only win if you win, and that's how any training company should operate."***
>
> Kyle Green, Digital Tutors

"We explicitly create content for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels and teach to each phase, in a peer-to-peer style that explains the how and why behind what's being covered in the training. We know it's not just learning the content that helps you succeed, but being able to apply what you've learned to your own projects."

The videos have been created over a number of years by Digital Tutors' internal team and extensive author network of more than 200 professionals. Green says new members to its team go through a month of training before anything gets recorded, while its external authors are taken through a QA process to ensure the quality of videos is of as high a standard as possible.

"Internal authors have a great grasp of teaching key fundamentals that are so critical, and our external network can share advanced tips they used on recent games they just finished or dive into new software being adopted by the industry," he states.

A monthly subscription to join its courses starts at $29 (£19), which gives users unlimited viewing access to both the Digital Tutors and Pluralsight libraries. Price breaks for annual subscriptions are also available, as are group options for multiple users.

Though numerous tutorials are available free across the internet from users and tools providers alike, something Green acknowledges even its subscribers should take advantage of, he says its own library of content remains valuable due to regular videos from experts across the industry.

"We only win if you win, and that's how any training company should operate," says Green. "Now if we put on our 'bias hat', we'd also say because we have tonnes of courses to pick from, new content every day, learning paths to help you know what to watch, a great learning experience and people who really care. And top game studios rely on us too, but we can't fit our 'name-dropping hat' over the bias hat so we'll stop here." ■

The Digital Tutors team has created thousands of video tutorials covering all aspects of games development, all available in one place on the firm's site

INFO

Courses: 2,000+ videos

Country: USA (Global)

Staff: Joshua Kinney (Games Instructor), **Justin Marshall** (3D/Games Instructor), **Delano Athias** (Rigging/Animation Instructor), **Eddie Russell** (Texturing Instructor)

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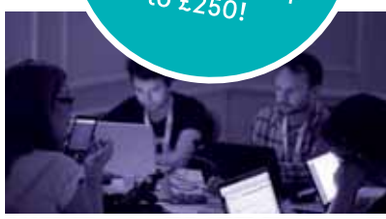

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Come and be inspired by what other developers are up to – the innovations and successes. Then take that inspiration back to the studio with you!

Networking

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Speakers include:

Indie Keynote:
Rami Ismail, Vlambeer

Rami is co-founder of Vlambeer, the pioneering studio responsible for Super Crate Box, Ridiculous Fishing and Luftrausers.

Evolve
The World as Your Game Map: Blending Virtual Experiences with Real-World Activity and Exploration
John Hanke, Niantic Labs

Evolve
'We're not playing very hard!' Using Children to Design Games
Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Digital Cultures Research Centre, University of the West of England, Bristol

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Allow Them to Believe: Lessons in Creating Rich Dynamic VR Gameplay
Katie Goode, Triangular Pixels

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Narrative as a Service: Can Story Help Retain Players?
Ed Fear, Mediatonic

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The Making of Lumino City: Paint, Paper & Pixels, State of Play Games
Katherine Bidwell, State of Play Games

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Tulin Green, Perforce

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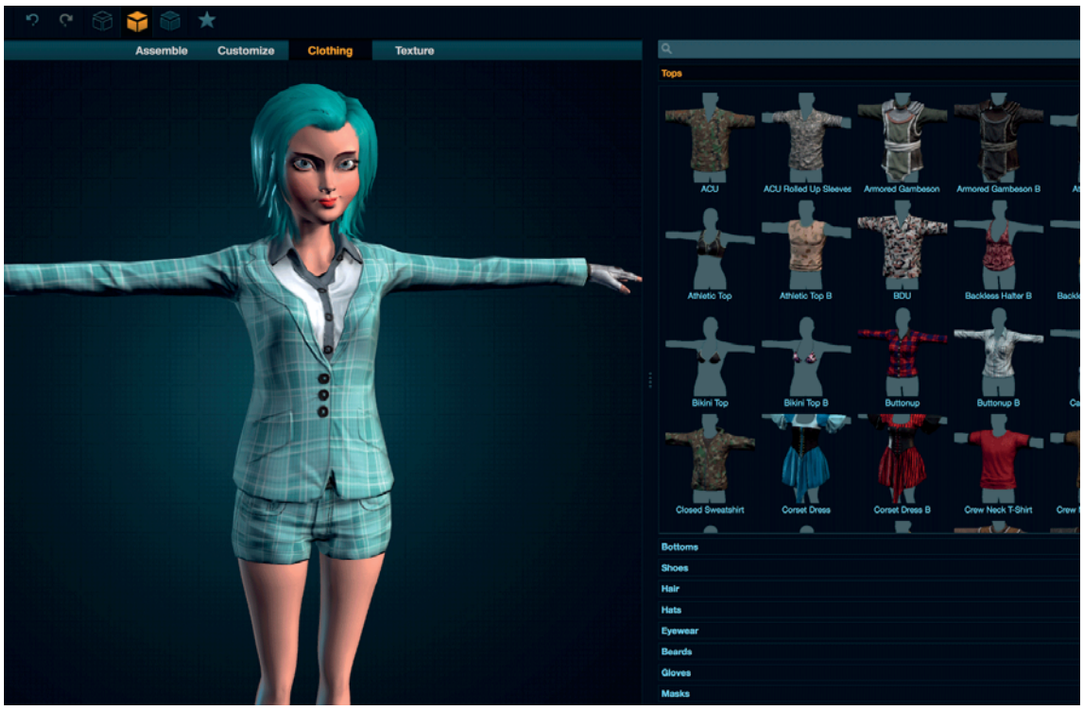
P39

UNREAL DIARIES
How the Unreal Dev Grants are helping developers create
P41

UNITY FOCUS
Why Campo Santo chose the engine for its adventure game Firewatch
P43

Model attitudes

With calls for more diversity in video games characters, **James Batchelor** looks at how the process of modelling and animation is enabling new ideas to come to life



BACK IN THE semi-early days of arcade and video games – once we had progressed beyond simple geometric shapes such as Pac-Man's sliced circle or *Asteroids*' rotating arrow – character design was crucial. It was a challenge. Developers had to make every pixel count to ensure the star of their game didn't look too similar to a moustached plumber or a blue hedgehog.

> ***"It's way more fun to design people in a huge spectrum than the same generic bro and hot chick."***
>
> Amanda Christensen, Gearbox

And yet ironically, as tools and graphical capabilities have improved, a push towards realism has led to many of the industry's leading franchises veering towards generic protagonists. How often does a best-seller have someone other than a muscular, gun-wielding man or a svelte female on the cover?

The tide is slowly starting to turn, with a number of developers working hard to design more unusual characters – and not just for kids or family titles. Blizzard has often spoken of how important diversity has been when designing the cast of upcoming shooter *Overwatch*, while Hi-Rez Studios has based the fighters in its MOBA *Smite* on the gods of various cultures in the hopes of achieving global appeal.

During a panel at PAX South earlier this year, Gearbox concept artist Amanda Christensen discussed how the *Borderlands* team encompass so many body types and ethnicities in its series – and the answer is surprisingly simple.

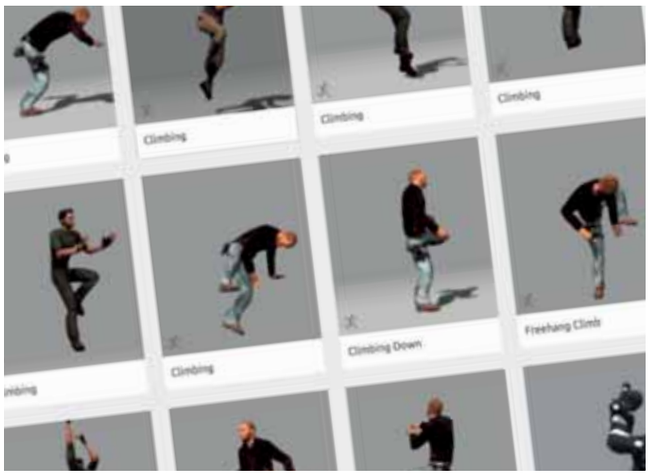
"It's just good design," she told attendees. "It's way more fun to design people in a huge spectrum than the same generic bro and hot chick over and over again."

Cédric Guiard, CEO of character animation specialist Eisko, tells *Develop* that this attitude is spreading: "We find that animators really want to push their craft and I think we're very much on the cusp of seeing real change in the way that in-game characters are portrayed. This is partly to do with the maturing of the industry and its audience, but also partly due to technological advances. We know that gamers appreciate stories and narrative; the next battle is in creating more diverse characters."

Ikinema's Alexandre Pechev says while the quality of rendering is improving, animation is lacking behind

Autodesk's Maurice Patel (above) says animation software is merely a tool for creation, the capabilities of which have little bearing on character divesifiation in games

Right, top to bottom: Tarsier's Hunger and Mixamo's customisable animation packs



With demand rising for more diverse characters, developers would do well to equip themselves with the ability to steer away from template protagonists. Certainly there are a variety of comprehensive digital content creation tools on the market from leading tools providers such as Autodesk, The Foundry and Mixamo. In fact, the latter boasts that its own tool has 280 body-altering sliders, allowing for a plethora of character modelling possibilities.

DIVERSIFICATION

But Autodesk's senior media and entertainment industry marketing manager Maurice Patel warns that designers still need to have fresh ideas to begin with.

"The choice of the character created for a game has nothing to do with the creative tools themselves and everything to do with the design aesthetic and storyline of the game being created," he says. "This is very much beyond the control of the tools provided."

In addition to diversity, there is also a push for more relatable characters. Strong females in games such as *BioShock Infinite*'s Elizabeth and *The Last of Us*' Ellie have garnered critical acclaim. While the former might be slightly stylised, the latter is one of the most realistic looking characters out there, standing toe-to-toe with the motion-captured Kevin Spacey of last year's *Call of Duty* and Ellen Page of *Beyond: Two Souls*.

But tools firm Ikinema stresses that animators need to push their craft in order to keep up with graphical capabilities. It's no good having a realistic model if it doesn't move realistically.

"The quality of game rendering is improving with every new release, but game animation is still somewhat lacking behind," founder and CEO Alexandre Pechev says. "Characters are still using either just blending of keyframed animation or simple two-bones rigs and, in almost all cases, only on humans. This leads to stiff and unrealistic poses and animation."

Guiard adds that the facial animation can be just as important: "The biggest challenge for games is to ensure the fidelity of the delivered model to the morphology, materials and expressions of the subject. People's expressions and the way their faces move – particularly when talking – are all unique and provide a 'facial fingerprint' in terms of identifying a particular person, as much as their likeness does."

He goes on to stress that designers need to pay attention to detail, as a "seemingly small and subtle difference really can make a big impact on how players react to characters".

ANIMATION COSTS

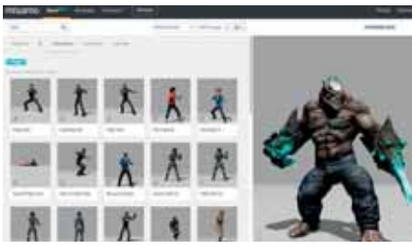
The challenge many developers face, particularly smaller studios, is the time, resource and cost required to create enough animations and models to bring diversity to their game's cast – particularly if you're using motion and performance capture.

It's understandable why developers use the same rigs for multiple characters or enemy types, but Mixamo's Tyler Georgeson says this is where exploring the tools available can really help.

"Building unique libraries of motions can be costly for studios because they have to recreate the wheel with each and every new character that they build," he says. "We've heard horror stories about triple-A studios taking two weeks to source motion capture files from one department to another.

"With 3D animation software, animation teams can easily leverage the motions already in the tool's collection, making them far easier for artists to find and customise for their own needs. Even if these animations

> ***"A seemingly small, subtle difference can make a big impact on how players react to characters."***
>
> Cédric Guiard, Eisko



Top to bottom: Eisko's Cedric Guiard and Mixamo's Tyler Georgeson

Left clockwise: Blizzard's upcoming game Overwatch, Mixamo's Fuse tool, an Ikinema creation in Maya and the Mixamo webgl viewer

end up being replaced by custom work, the time saved in working out gameplay mechanics and technical problems without having to wait on art assets can cut dev cycle costs big time."

Cost and increased dev time is also becoming an excuse that even triple-A studios find themselves unable to use. Ubisoft courted controversy last year when claiming that adding a playable female character to *Assassin's Creed: Unity*'s co-op mode would have "doubled the workload", while *Call of Duty* producer Mark Rubin claimed that bringing females into the series required a whole new engine.

Develop spoke to animators at the time who suggested there are plenty of workarounds and Ikinema's Pechev agrees, adding that there's still room for improvement.

"More needs to be done, in our opinion, on setting up pipelines for retargeting animation from male to female," he says, "but with additional controls on top to add a behaviour where certain body parts are additionally modified to give the correct feel. This needs to be done during gameplay to reduce on storage requirements for game animation, but off-line retargeting should be a good first start."

Guiard adds: "We capture and reproduce female characters in incredible detail, ready for animators to use. This costs no more than capturing a male character."

SMART MOVES

That's all well and good when you're creating characters whose movement will be powered by the beefier power of PC and the newest consoles. But what of the countless studios trying to bring unique game experience to smart devices?

There are plenty of examples of high-quality animation in mobile games. Camouflaj's episodic stealth title *République*, for example, uses mo-cap to bring its characters to life. Third-party tools can be of assistance, but it's vital to take each platform's requirements into account – particularly if you plan to deploy to multiple devices.

"Developers have enough challenges to overcome when moving from one platform to another and the tools need to be identical across the board," says Pechev. "Main characters should and must have the same animation pipeline on all devices so that the look and feel is not 'lost' in the translation."

> ***"More needs to be done on setting up pipelines for retargeting animation from male to female."***
>
> Alexandre Pechev, Ikinema

Guiard adds: "Whilst the graphical performance of mobiles and tablets are increasing year-on-year, it is still obviously some way behind console and PC – the latter of which still leads with regards to the graphical fidelity of character modelling.

"PC can utilise over 35 Facial Action Units – the expressions a face can pull – whereas mobile is restricted to less than ten. This is a major consideration if a game is being released across all platforms, as the consumer wants to see the same recognisable characters in each platform.

"In addition, it's massively important for studios to maximise their development assets across all platforms. Having the same model for a character that's usable on mobile, console, and PC, is a massive benefit, from consumer appeal, budgetary consideration and time-saving perspectives."

But as Autodesk's Patel has said, modeling and animation software are merely the tools to bring your vision to life. Diversity and distinct characters begin with design, and if you don't spend time on this crucial early stage, your game's protagonist will blend in with the others. It's also important to put as much time into character design as the overall art style of your title.

ARTISTIC LICENCE

"The primary challenge, for a number of reasons, is ensuring the character matches the style of the game," says Guiard.

"That's probably quite obvious, but coming from a film background, all of us at Eisko are aware of parallel challenges within films and games, particularly with regard to casting people with the appropriate appearance to suit the character design of the studio, prior to capturing and reconstructing the model of the character."

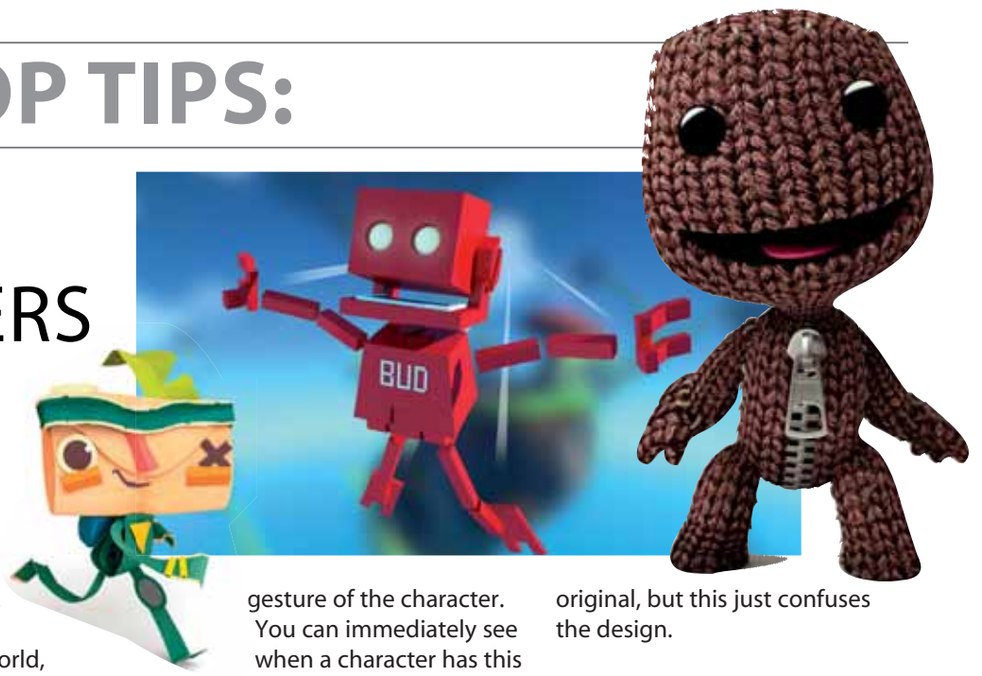
Mixamo's Georgeson recommends that developers define the art style of their game first: "Find references and start establishing your look. That can help solve a ton of technical headaches before you ever hit them. Going for a blocky 8-bit look? Your polygon budget probably won't be much of a concern. No transparency? Less draw calls. Flat shading or PBR? Making higher poly characters? Think about how you can leverage your maps to add detail while optimising the mesh topology."

The visual styles of video games has never been as varied as it is today, but it's just as important that this variety spreads to the cast of characters populating each virtual world.

While great headway has been made in the last few years, only by fully exploring what artists can do – whether with third-party tools or with in-house software – can developers create the gaming icons of the future. ■

DEVELOP'S TOP TIPS:

HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHARACTERS STAND OUT



Developers and artists share their experience of creating iconic characters

REX CROWLE, CREATIVE LEAD, MEDIA MOLECULE

■ Firstly, the character needs to be bold, and have a recognisable silhouette. They'll be seen at all different angles and scales, so they need to be readable no matter what situation they are in. And that extends to when the character starts being used on promotional stickers, billboards and lunch boxes.

■ It's good if their mere appearance tells a story or intrigues the player in some way. A classic is to give them a scar, because then we all wonder: how did they get that scar? Was it earned in a heroic knife-fight or did they fall over in the bath?

■ That said, when every character has got a scar that ceases to be as interesting, so it's good to think of things other than scars. Iota and Atoi from *Tearaway* were designed to be made from sealed envelopes, so that players wonder what's sealed inside the envelopes. And I still wonder what we'd see if Sackboy undid his zip.

NICK MILES, PRINCIPAL CONCEPT ARTIST, RADIANT WORLDS

■ Consider the broad relationships. Narrative and background will help to give the character purpose and influence design, as well as determine material and palette choices. Has this character come from a lush world, or somewhere more austere? Are they a joker or a warrior? Knowing this will help you to create an engaging design.

■ Consider the equilibrium between character and environment; both should complement each other with shared design cues. The character design should then seek to evolve those rules to further enrich the world. *SkySaga*, for example, is a voxel world so the character design reflects that but also adds subtle curves and tapering forms to further expand the visual library.

■ Materials can propel a character design from mundane to memorable. Sometimes making your character wholly out of a novel material such as wool or jelly may be enough to give them a unique look if applicable to the world. Otherwise, seeking a good mix of fabrics and metals in a design gives surface variety and adds interest.

DAN CROSSLAND, LEAD CHARACTER ARTIST, NINJA THEORY

■ One of the most important considerations when starting out a new character is understanding the attitude behind the character. From there, you can build rhythms running through the body that support and build upon the gesture of the character. You can immediately see when a character has this inner strength.

■ If this is in place, the character will be more appealing to look at because of these flow lines. This starts right from the concept sculpt phase – by posing characters in Zbrush early in the development it enables us to be confident that the T-pose can hit those key hero poses when animated.

ANDY GREEN, SENIOR TECHNICAL ARTIST, BOSSA STUDIOS

■ Design your character's proportions, mesh topology, and textures based upon your game's camera angle and zoom. Characters that will permanently be far from the camera need to be chunky and clear. Don't pile detail into areas of the character the player will seldom see.

JACK GOOD, SENIOR ARTIST, BOSSA STUDIOS

■ Get to a point where you think you're happy with the design, then see what you can remove or simplify without changing the essence of the character. I often see artists plastering stuff onto characters in the hope that they'll create something original, but this just confuses the design.

DAN LISH, SENIOR CONCEPT ARTIST, BOSSA STUDIOS

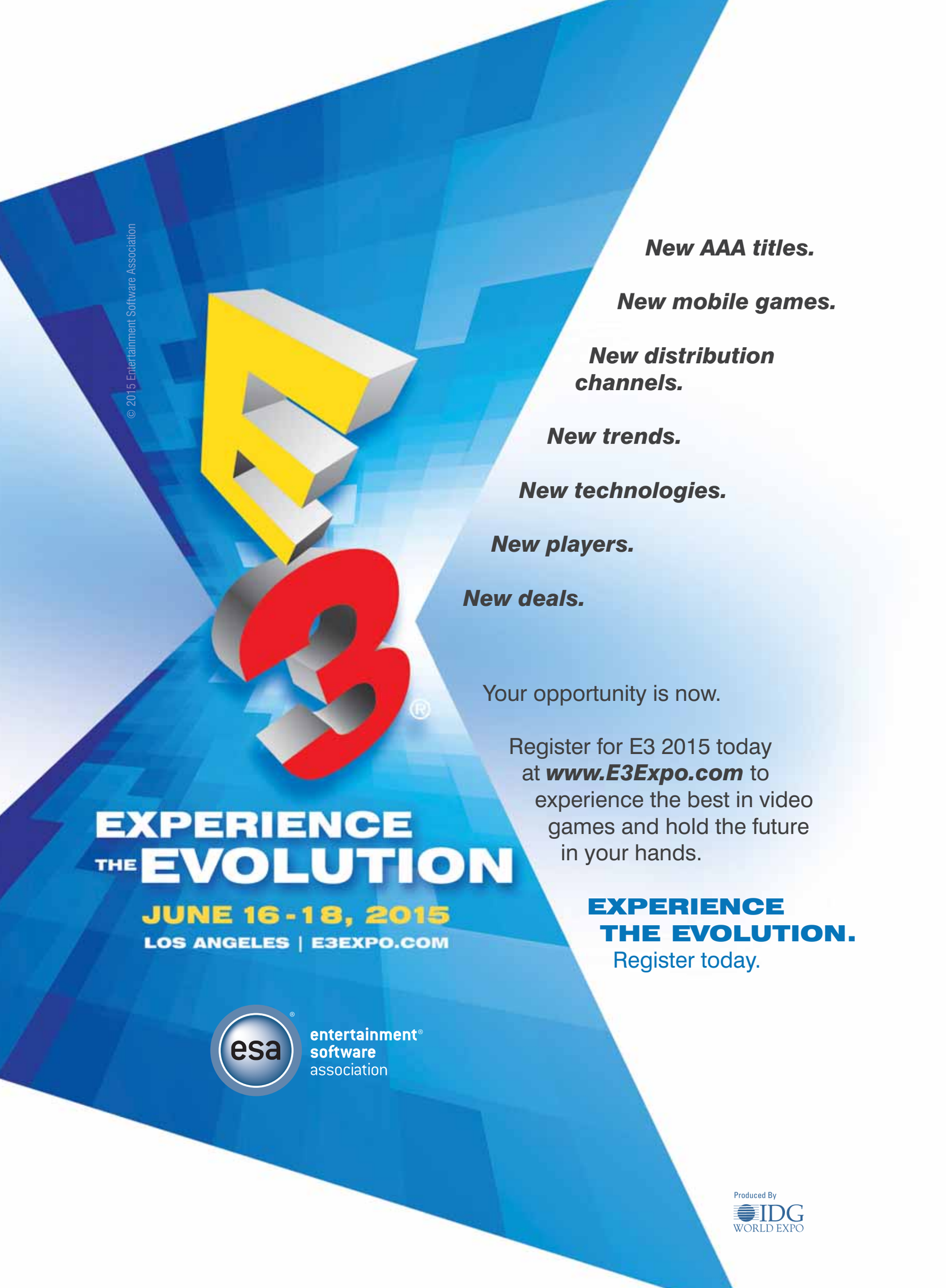
■ Listen to the direction from the lead artist or art director. Create thumbnail sketches – digitally or traditionally, whatever you find easier – to get you ideas down fast and fluid. Then go through an approval process, tighten the roughs to a more polished standard, considering asymmetry, composition, good silhouettes, originality of style and so on.

JACK COUVELA, ART DIRECTOR, REFLECTIONS

■ Form should follow function. With *Grow Home*, we had a physics-driven character with momentum, resulting in a lot of stumbling steps and wobbling about. We designed BUD's personality around that movement by making him childlike: large babyish head, wide innocent eyes and a big goofy grin.

THE OLIVER TWINS, RADIANT WORLDS

■ When designing a character for a child-friendly game we would ensure it used a selected handful of bright colours and had a bold silhouette. It would have key iconic poses and exaggerated animations that would reflect its attitude and actions. It would need to be unique, memorable and fit within its universe.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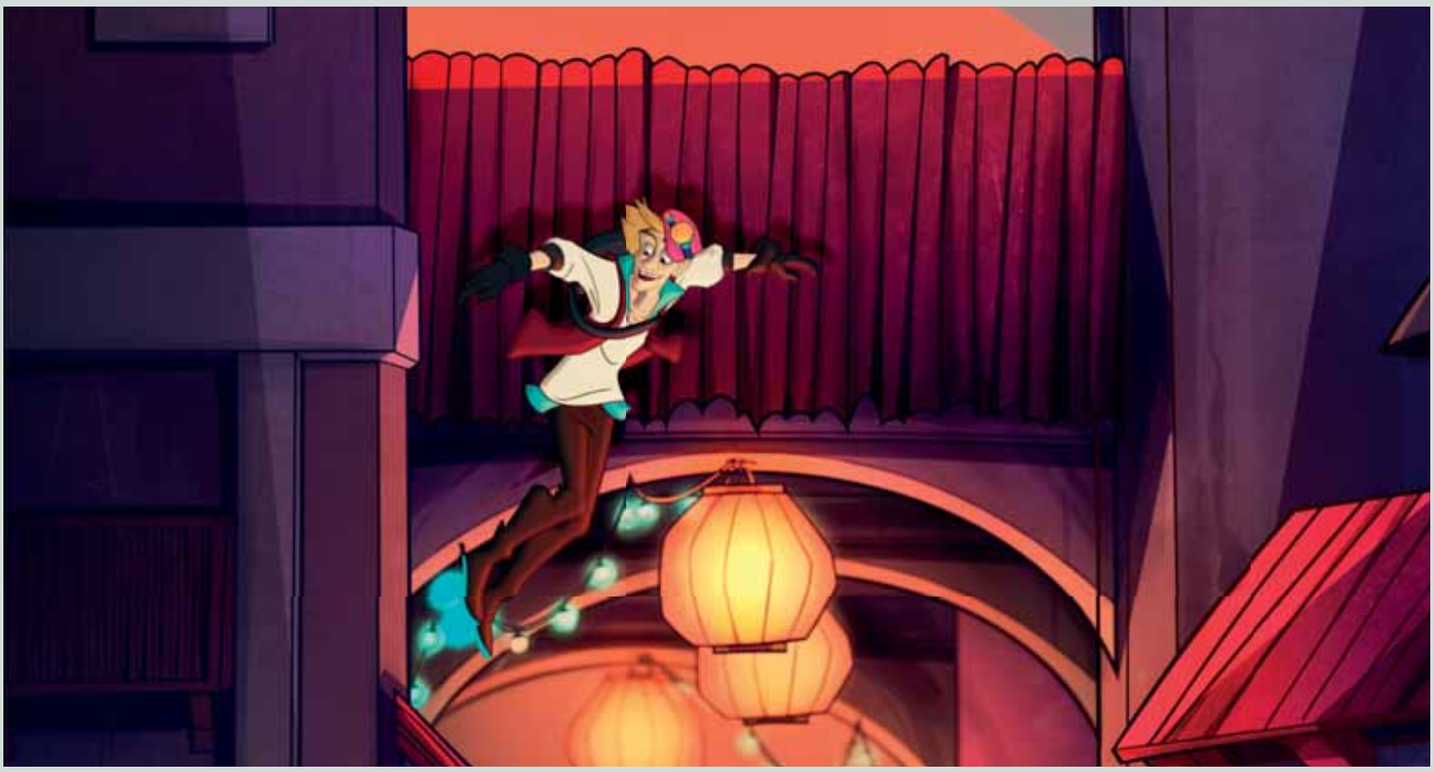

KEY RELEASE

Harmonious **animation**

Toon Boom is making a big push into games with the latest release of its 2D animation tool Harmony 12. **Craig Chapple** asks why this new update is such a big deal for artists and just what new features it houses

The image above shows off one of Harmony 12's key new features: light shading, which creates a light source in the middle of the drawing

THOUGH IT'S A tool used in TV shows like *The Simpsons* and in *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge out of Water*, 2D animation tool Harmony may not yet be widely known in the games industry. That could all be about to change with the twelfth edition.

The tool enables artists to sketch a character, then create a rig and animate it, and lastly export it into a game engine.

> ***"This connection to Unity is the biggest public thing we've done. It represents a major move into gaming."***
>
> Bob Bennett, Toon Boom

"A lot of times people will sketch inside Harmony as a first stage and then go over that sketch with vector tools to refine the shape of the character, or the prop that they're creating for their game," Toon Boom director of marketing Bob Bennett tells *Develop*. "And one of the nice things about the drawing suite inside of Harmony is that it provides both vector and bitmap drawing tools.

"Once you've created your character, the next step is to essentially break it down into its constituent parts, or what a lot of people call sprites, and organise the drawing into layers.

"And at this point you're ready to rig. Harmony has a set of bones not unlike what you'd see inside 3ds Max or perhaps Maya.

UNITING GAME DEVELOPERS

Once the animation process is complete, character set-ups, sprite sheets and XML files can be exported to the game engine. To this end, Toon Boom has just released a Unity plug-in onto the Asset Store. Artists can also access a new Previewer in Unity before all the assets are exported.

New subscription tiers for the tool have also been made available, and developers can download the tool from the Toon Boom website for the first time.

Three packages are available to purchase: Harmony Essentials ($375), Advanced ($975) and Premium ($1,975). Monthly desktop subscriptions for Mac and PC users are also available, starting at $23 per month and going up to $109 per month for the full suite.

The different tiers, subscription packages and Unity plug-in signal the firm's big move into games development.

"For years gaming has always been a market for us," says Bennett. "But this connection to Unity is the biggest public thing we've done. It in effect represents a major move by us into the gaming market."

As well as core changes to the business model and the release of a Unity plug-in, a series of updates have also been made to the tool suite itself. Fresh additions include new surface volume and lighting features for 2D objects, bitmap brush improvements, a simpler set of bone deformers and support for open platform tools such as OpenFX plug-ins and Collada and Alembic 3D files.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

One big new feature introduced in Harmony 12 is light shading. Bennett says it's akin to rendering in the 3D world.

"Normally, in order to get the darker highlights on the back of a character, we would have to manually draw that or we'd have to create a little object that has a slightly darker colour that we marry to the back of the character's leg, and as we frame it, introduce this little dark tone. So it's like a cheat," he explains.

"In this case, we would put a light source in the middle of the drawing, and the highlights, both the light ones and the dark ones, have been automatically computed by Harmony. So basically it creates a normal map and the light sources can be coloured, they can be moving. It's not a full 3D renderer, but it could save people a tremendous amount of time."

www.toonboom.com ■

HEARD ABOUT

Sounds of the forest

John Broomhall talks with Ori and the Blind Forest composer Gareth Coker on creating the game's unique music

ORI AND THE Blind Forest is a side-scrolling 'Metroidvania' platformer, set in the 2D open world of the forest of Nibel. The player controls Ori who, after a cataclysmic event has 'blinded' the forest, sets off to restore it by recovering the light of the three main elements that support the balance of Nibel.

Composer Gareth Coker explains the role of music in the game: "We always knew we wanted the music to take Ori's point of view. Additionally, after working with initial sound effects, we found music would paint the broad emotional brushstrokes, and sound would provide the finer detail through Ori's attack audio and interactions with the creatures and objects throughout Nibel."

With no dialogue in the game, the emotional impact of the game had to be delivered through the animation and visuals. Coker then used the music, which he says was "largely informed by the visuals", to drive these emotions home.

"For example, the Forlorn Ruins are blue, cold, and icy so I used sounds to match that aesthetic, like lots of metallic bowed percussion," he explains. "The Ginso Tree takes place inside a tree-trunk, so I used wooden percussion such as marimba, woodblocks and hollow logs. Valley Of The Wind makes use of wind instruments, notably bansuri. We tied all these esoteric sounds together with orchestra, piano, and vocals. There's no focus on one culture. Instead, the score aims to make the player feel like they are in a 'Nibellian' culture."

A DISTINCT SOUND

The three featured soloists on the game – Aeralie Brighton for voice, Rachel Mellis for ethnic winds, and Tom Boyd on oboe – were recorded at Coker's own LA studio, whilst the Nashville Music Scoring Orchestra tracked at Ocean Way Studios.

A 56-piece orchestra provided the 'big moments' whilst a 25-strong group covered the remaining 75 per cent or more intimate-sounding sections. Extensive triggers deploy the resulting cues as appropriate.

"The music for the Spirit Caverns is quite subtle at first," Coker explains, by way of example, "but when you gain the Wall Jump ability, the score transitions via a stinger to a Spirit Caverns theme variation with way more momentum, because Ori has more freedom of movement than before.

"For the Ginso Tree, I composed a 12-minute 'suite' of music, which is broken down into several seamless cues which ebb and flow reflecting your progress or situation. Throughout the game, we gave extensive thought to how music flows and how we could encourage the player to always move forward. It meant relentless testing – I must have put well over 1,000 hours into the game at this point."

Coker notes that the development process behind *Ori and the Blind Forest* was unusual as the studio is globally distributed. This created some logistical challenges, as departments on different continents attempted to co-ordinate. But the composer says the team gradually turned this into a strength.

"At any point in the day, there would be someone working on the game," he says. "When we did our daily repository updates, we'd often have something new to play, see, or hear. Having such early ground floor access to the game's development allowed me to give input not just as a composer, but also a gamer. This is one of the key reasons why not just music, but everything in the game feels very cohesive.

"It's really rewarding – as both a composer and gamer – to be given the freedom to experiment and give feedback on the game's design from such an early stage. This collaborative and almost democratic approach works in a small team such as Moon Studios, whose open-mindedness surely enabled the game to come together in such a wonderful way." ■

John Broomhall is a game audio specialist creating and directing music, sound and dialogue
www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

Ori and the Blind Forest composer Gareth Coker says the game combines together all kinds of instruments and sounds from different cultures in an effort to create a distinct, 'Nibellian' sound

MADE WITH MARMALADE

Cut costs, not creativity

Devs discuss how cross-platform tools like Marmalade are not only better for their games, but for their business as well

Top-to-bottom: Exient's James Mintram and Mad Fellows' Paul Norris agree that ensuring your game works across different devices and operating systems is essential

SMARTPHONES AND TABLETS are ubiquitous today. Travel anywhere and you won't go more than a few minutes without seeing someone on a smart device of some form.

But unlike other sectors of technology, there is diminishing brand loyalty when it comes to mobile devices. In such an environment, mobile games developers can no longer afford to have titles locked to a single platform.

"Today many people have different devices and expect to be able to start a game on one and continue on another," says Exient programmer James Mintram. "And these aren't always on the same platform – I myself have an iOS and Android device. Being cross-platform is no longer a selling point, but something all high quality games support."

There is, of course, the issue of market fragmentation. With so many different devices available across multiple operating systems, developing cross-platform games can seem a daunting prospect. Fortunately, established tools such as Marmalade make the process considerably easier.

"Marmalade's support allows our studio to focus only on game-related problems and we do not need to worry about fragmentation on the hundreds of handsets that we support," says EA Helsinki's senior director of operations and engineering Henrik Lönnroth.

"Plus, as we only have one codebase, we're able to allow users to play their same game across different devices. They can play their *SimCity* game on iPhone while on the go and on their Android tablet later.

"Since Marmalade takes care of most of the handset-specific issues, we have minimised any need for porting any of the game features to either platform. In most cases, we write the feature once and have it working on both iOS and Android."

DEFT DEPLOYMENT

It's not just about convenience for players. Developing cross-platform games as efficiently as possible can be beneficial to your business as well.

"Being able to simultaneously launch on two platforms naturally doubles the amount of possible players," Lönnroth continues.

"We chose Marmalade as it is low-level enough to allow us to do almost everything that we would do in a native application if we would have targeted only one platform."

> ***"If you don't support multiple platforms, you are leaving yourself at a massive disadvantage."***
>
> James Mintram, Exient

Cross-platform tools can also be useful for deploying to multiple platforms, even if your game was specifically developed for one. Mad Fellows' Paul Norris recalls that the studio's rhythm action title *Sinewave* was initially a timed exclusive for Windows.

"Once that period had ended, we were able to make decisions on what platforms to support from there, without the need to consider excessive work porting the game," he says. "It put us in a very favourable position to react to opportunities and be first in line saying 'yes, we can do that'."

Norris adds that being able to modify or release games for multiple platforms also makes it easier to take advantage of mobile marketplaces' all important Featured spots when they become available.

He says: "Being able to quickly respond to opportunities for promotions and incentives, without managing and maintaining different versions of the game, is a huge bonus in terms of relationships with platform holders."

Norris also notes that an advantage of Marmalade is the tool works particularly well with C++, allowing Mad Fellows "to develop the game our own way while giving us access to a variety of platforms".

Mintram adds that the advantages of this cannot be understated: "Being able to write games in C++ gives you an edge over the competition. You can harness every little low level trick while still benefiting from the higher level platform abstractions. Today's mobile market is very competitive and to succeed you need to differentiate yourself."

Mintram observes that being cross-platform is no longer an option – it's essential, and keeping costs low is key.

"There are two main costs associated with developing cross-platform: writing the code and platform experience. Cross-platform tools significantly reduce both of those.

"I would say supporting multiple platforms is a requirement for almost all successful mobile games, making it an essential element to success. If you don't support multiple platforms then you are leaving yourself at a massive disadvantage." ■

Why Marmalade matters

Cross-platform tool Marmalade enables devs to deploy their titles to multiple platforms quickly and efficiently, removing the need to port or rewrite any code.

www.madewithmarmalade.com

UNREAL DIARIES

The Future is Unreal

Epic Games offers a glimpse at the first recipients of its $5m Unreal Dev Grants

EPIC RECENTLY LAUNCHED Unreal Dev Grants to provide financial support to innovative projects being built with Unreal Engine 4.

Epic aims to hand out $5m in grants, and in March the company awarded nine teams with $139,000 of no-strings-attached funding to help bring their visions to life.

From ultra-realistic architectural visualisations to VR projects, beautiful shooters and beyond, take a look at the first incredible Unreal Dev Grants recipients:

404SIGHT
A dozen graduate students from the University of Utah, known as Retro Yeti Games, have developed *404Sight* as a statement about protecting net neutrality, blending gameplay elements from *Mirror's Edge*, *Robot Unicorn Attack* and *Wipeout*.

ADR1FT
Coming to PC, consoles and virtual reality, *Adr1ft* is a first-person experience that tells the story of an astronaut in peril. Awakened in the aftermath of a catastrophic event, low on oxygen and disoriented, *Adr1ft* challenges you to survive in a dangerous and unforgiving environment.

CONSIGHT
Built by three recent graduates from the University of Design in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany, *Consight* allows you to view and control real-time architectural visualisations from an iPad interface. The students will benefit from a $15,000 grant as they work to bring this thesis project to market.

DEAD STATIC DRIVE
Described by creator Mike Blackney as "Grand Theft Cthulu", this '80s-themed driving horror game features striking, comic-book-styled visual design. It has been developed almost entirely by Blackney himself – with the help of some friends.

KOOLA
We highlighted Koola in the March issue of *Develop*, and this French artist was among the very first Unreal Dev Grants recipients. His masterful, hyper-realistic landscapes and architectural visualisations have inspired other developers to follow in his footsteps to push realism to its limits.

NELO
Perhaps the most impressive thing about *Nelo* is that this gorgeous, gritty third-person shooter has been developed by only three people. The team at Magic and Mirrors has showcased some great character, enemy and location design – not to mention atmosphere.

NUREN: THE NEW RENAISSANCE
The world's first virtual reality rock opera, *Nuren* is a stunning audio/visual experience designed and created by Jake Kaufman and Jessie Seely. The audio engineer and artist/voice actress team successfully completed a Kickstarter campaign in March, and coupled with their grant, they seem well on their way to delivering on this promising vision.

PLANET ALPHA 31
Developed by just two people at this point – Adrian Lazar and a contract sound designer – the Epic team has been consistently impressed by *Planet Alpha 31*. This immersive, story-driven puzzle-platformer takes place in a constantly-changing world – and what a beautiful world it is.

STORM UNITED
After switching engines to take advantage of Unreal Engine 4's new subscription model, PixelBeam is on the verge of a Steam Greenlight campaign for its massively multiplayer FPS. The team is working hard to implement deep social and competitive game features, and a $10,000 Unreal Dev Grant will help them along the way.

Keep an eye on the Unreal Engine blog as Epic unveils more recipients of Unreal Dev Grants. ■
www.unrealengine.com/blog

Clockwise from top left: Student project 404Sight, VR experience Adr1ft, an exaple of Koola's photorealistic landscapes, multiplayer shooter Storm United, gritty sci-fi shooter Nelo, and architectural visualisation tool Consight

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS

Nordic Game
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June 16th to 18th
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THE FUTURE STATE

Everything has changed

VMC's **Kirstin Whittle** discusses an ongoing shift that affects the role services like QA play in games development

QA has become an essential requirement throughout the lifecycle of games such as Boom Beach (above) as updates are shipped routinely to keep players engaged

This new bi-monthly column will look at how global production support services and outsourcing trends, methodologies, and working models continue to change and evolve. It will also explore what it really means to support the games development and publishing process across the multitude of platforms, genres, and business models that exist in games today.

A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT has occurred in the games industry over the past few years. This may seem like an obvious statement in an industry that thrives on continual technological innovation and re-invention, but it goes far beyond the games themselves. The old retail model – put your game in a box and ship it to the stores – has transformed into a world where everything is live all the time.

WORKING AS ONE

One of the most significant changes is how services that were until recently a relatively sequential process – design, then development, then QA, then localisation, then post-launch customer support – have begun to overlap and bleed together, to the point where everything now needs to work as one.

Where QA was once a pre-launch service, it is now an essential requirement throughout the life of the game as new DLC and updates are routinely developed and released.

It goes beyond isolated tests on new content to include verifying compatibility with all existing content and making sure it all works together in real-world conditions. This is also true of localisation and support. Most high-profile games, and even many true indie titles, have some level of these services happening all the time. Outsourced services have really become 24/7 processes.

This shift is driving a change in the relationships between content creators and outsourcers, and a change in the mindset of how both do business. The new always-on environment and the global reach of our products means outsourcing providers need to be true partners with developers and publishers, not simply vendors.

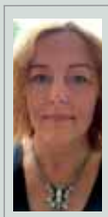
Smart outsourcers are bringing more value to their clients through flexible, innovative solutions. For example, the cyclical nature of QA and live game operations – as the need for one rises, need for the other recedes – is creating opportunities for hybrid solutions that integrate these services and allow a consistent, manageable level of resources and support. Everything from localisation to global beta testing and community management is increasingly more tightly integrated.

We are truly a global industry now – anyone can publish globally because distribution is no longer reliant on companies with physical presence in other regions.

PLAYER SUPPORT

For the games industry, that means increasingly direct relationships with our customers and the need to be responsive to them. Because direct customer communication is outside the core competency of many developers and publishers, a strong partnership with an outsourcer that specialises in community engagement and player support enables each partner to focus on what they do best.

One thing is certain: the industry is not going back to the old model of development and publishing. Changes in player behaviour and expectations, twinned with the continuing advancements in technology and the increased capability of flexible global production support services, have resulted in better games. There are so many new opportunities for forward-looking publishers, developers, and outsourcing partners, and it's exciting to be on the leading edge of all this change. ■



Kirstin Whittle has 23 years of experience in the UK games industry and is one of *MCV*'s 2015 Top Influential Women in Games. She manages business development in Europe for VMC.
www.vmc.com/games

UNITY FOCUS

Fuelling the fire

We talk to Campo Santo about how Unity 5 is powering its upcoming adventure game Firewatch

ALONE IN THE Wyoming wilderness, a summer job as a fire lookout takes a sinister tone as players start to experience strange encounters, with a supervisor on the other end of a walkie-talkie as their only human connection.

This is the intriguing premise of *Firewatch*, the debut game from new studio Campo Santo, and one that has garnered press and consumer attention from around the world. But co-founder Sean Vanaman says this title actually started as "more of an idea than a fully-fledged concept".

"I pitched my co-founder Jake Rodkin on a game set up against the backdrop of Wyoming and the iconic image of the tower," he tells *Develop*. "That was just something I'd carried with me having grown up in Wyoming. From that tiny seed we found the right people and started turning it into an experience that reflected our values as designers and game developers.

"The relationship between the protagonists will, hopefully, be unlike anything in any other first-person adventure. We've worked hard to make it feel natural, to have it grow, branch, develop and feel 'real'. We want players to believe the people in the story are real, with a real connection, and I don't think a lot of games do that very often."

To create such a unique game, Campo Santo needed a game engine that was flexible and accessible, opting for indie favourite Unity.

"We are a new studio," says Rodkin. "We came together to create Campo Santo to build *Firewatch* and at our size – ten people – and our budget – not huge – Unity was the only thing that made sense. We were never going to use a tech that contractually meant we'd give up profits."

> ***"We came together to build Firewatch, and at our size Unity was the only thing that made sense."***
>
> Jake Rodkin, Campo Santo

The team were even lucky enough to gain access to the beta version of Unity 5.

Drawing on their experience with the previous edition, both Rodkin and Vanaman note that Unity 5 immediately displayed massive improvements to performance and upgrades to the UI tools and animation software Mecanim helped speed things up. However, Vanaman argues that no single feature can be considered as the hallmark of Unity 5.

"It's the medium-to-small stuff – the improvements that are almost invisible from the outside, but invaluable in practice – that are helping everyone work more quickly or overcome issues far more easily than expected," he says.

"The new deferred rendering pipeline is letting us do all the things we were doing in Unity 4 but with fewer draw calls, so our graphics programmer has more room to work as we finalise the look of trees, skies, and other stylised elements in our game."

With work on *Firewatch* coming along nicely, the Campo Santo team encourage other devs to explore Unity 5.

Rodkin says: "You aren't limited by what you can get out of the engine if you're working with folks who pride themselves on their ability to solve problems and ingenuity. We have lots of limiting factors in our work every day and the engine is hardly ever one of them." ■

Firewatch
Developer: Campo Santo
Publisher: Panic
Platform: PC, Mac, Linux
www.firewatchgame.com

Campo Santo founders Jake Rodkin (top) and Sean Vanaman (above) chose Unity 5 as they didn't want to give up any of their future profits on royalty fees

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SERVICES SPOTLIGHT:
iLogos Europe

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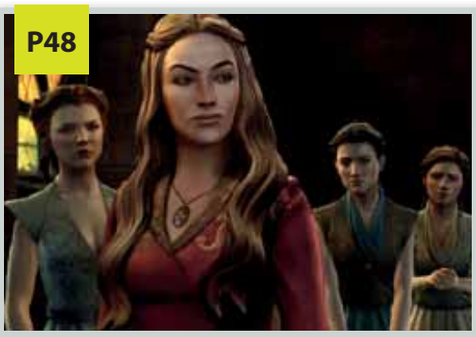

TOOLS SPOTLIGHT:
Plastic SCM

P49

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SERVICES SPOTLIGHT

This month: **iLogos Europe**

FOUNDED IN 2006, iLogos offers various services, including full game development from scratch to launch and post-release live operations, as well as help on specific tasks such as art production, animation, programming and porting.

The firm has worked on mobile and browser titles for clients in Europe, North America, Asia and the Middle East. Specific projects include *Shadow Fight 2*, *Star Battle* and *Megapolis*.

iLogos co-founder Alexander Goldybin (*far right*) says the firm is ideally suited to take on projects for publishers as its team has more than eight years of experience across hundreds of games, including a few top five grossing titles.

"We have also got ready-made game engines for building titles – city/farm/empire etcetera – plus action strategy, match-three/puzzle, fighting genres, with more coming soon," he states. "Using these helps significantly reduce dev time and make sure everything including core game loop, monetisation and so on works well."

Goldybin goes on to explain that collaborating with a company like iLogos on games development enables studios to share costs, and thus the risks involved – particularly if a game was to fail on release. It also gives developers access to those "market-proven" game engines, and can result in a shorter time-to-market than some studios may be unable to do as quickly in-house.

> ***"In the future, we want to create more 3D games on various platforms including consoles."***
>
> Alexander Goldybin, iLogos

"As part of a co-production, we also provide complete game design – including monetisation – and all kinds of creative services which outsourcing companies usually do not offer as far as we know," explains Goldybin.

"Of course, we handle the entire live ops after the game is done too. That

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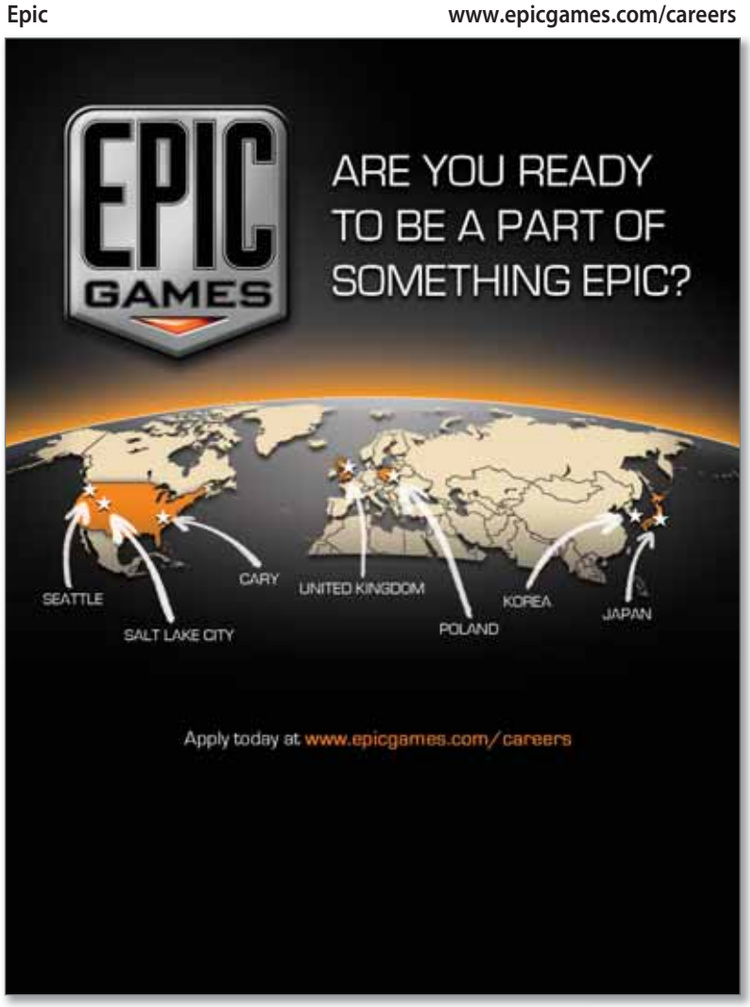

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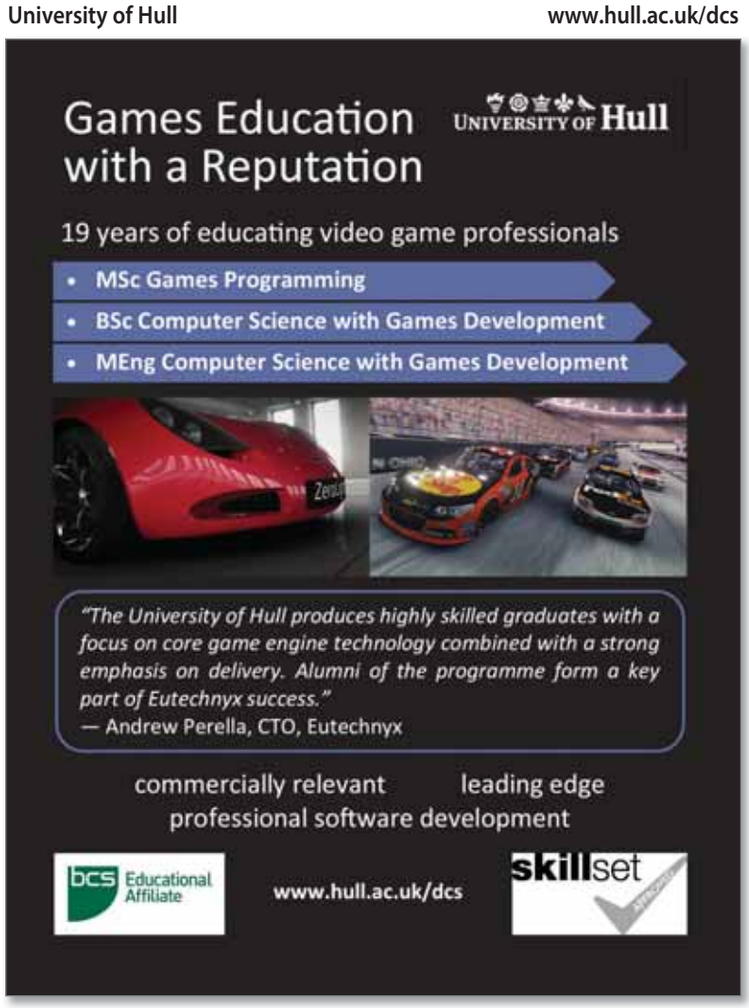
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means analytics and tuning, ongoing features development and content creation, server/hosting handling, and sometimes community management and customer service, along with localisation. In some very rare cases, we even do marketing. We are very flexible when it comes to what should be provided by us, and what should be done on a partner's side."

Despite growing to more than 300 staff and working on a plethora of games with firms such as EA, Rovio, Wargaming, Disney, Gameforge and Peak Games, Goldybin says there are still plans afoot to expand its services to new, emerging sectors.

"In the future we want to create more high-quality 3D games on various platforms, including consoles," he states. "We also plan to start with our first projects based for augmented and virtual reality devices.

"Once wearables become an attractive market we will surely support them as well. Additionally, as well as the tech we use now, such as Unity, Unreal Engine, Marmalade, Cocos2d-x, HTML5, and Flash; we want to add experimental projects based on other technology." ■

The iLogos team (above) have a range of game engines ready to go, covering a variety of popular mobile genres. It can use these to build titles for its clients, with examples including Megapolis (far left, top) and Star Battle (far left)

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TOOLS SPOTLIGHT

This month: **Plastic SCM**

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Suite 274
Los Gatos,
CA 95032

E: sales@codicesoftware.com
W: www.plasticscm.com

PLASTIC SCM IS a distributed version control system (DVCS) that creators Codice Software say is designed for games dev teams of any size.

Though promoted as offering a DVCS, it also works centralised. This means it can scale up to handle more than a thousand concurrent users.

Codice Software president Pablo Santos (*far right*) says the tool is able to handle big binaries and large repos, and features strong branching and merging, as well as GUI and visual abilities he claims were lacking from the previous generation of DVCS tools.

"Plastic SCM is like Git on steroids: it adds centralised, GUIs, support for huge files, a built-in Unity 3D plug-in, locking for unmergeable assets, partial replicas, ACL based security and it is able to natively speak the Git network protocol," he explains.

"This is not just another layer on top of Git: we built our own system from the ground up, which gives us a lot of freedom to adapt it to what our customers need.

"It is currently used by a wide range of teams: from small indie studios to large ones, from software teams in the automotive industry to aerospace and financing. 30 per cent of our customers are in the gaming industry and growing."

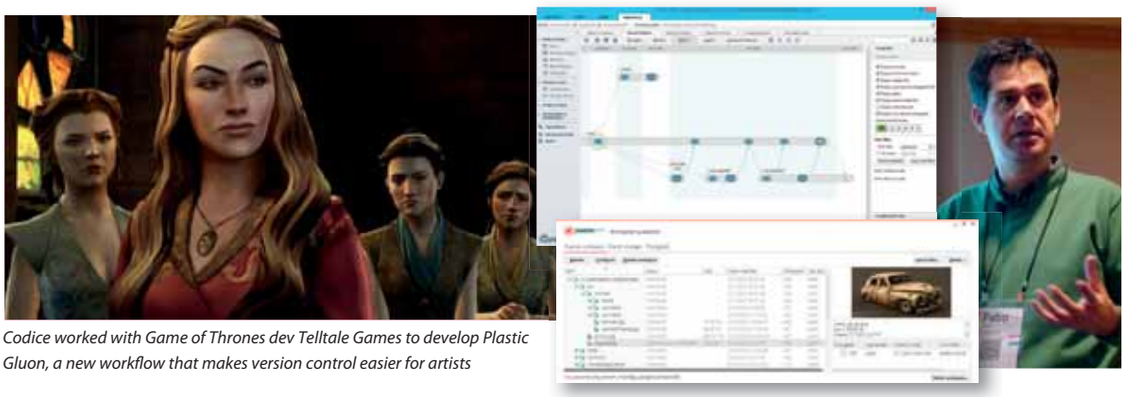
> ***"Plastic SCM is like Git on steroids. We built our own system from the ground up, which gives us a lot of freedom."***
>
> Pablo Santos, Codice Software

One of the latest additions is a new workflow for artists called Plastic Gluon.

Santos says the tool was developed after game studios were eager to move to a DVCS, while at the same time artists required mandatory file locking, support for big files and a different workflow of their own.

"Artists prefer to work in central mode – no additional push, just check-in – and a tool that helps them do what they do best: creative work," he explains. "So Gluon is the answer to that need: a one-size-fits-all wasn't the solution so we created a distinct user interface and workflow for artists, a tool they feel comfortable with, removing all the programmer-oriented features and getting adapted to the artist view of the project.

"Gluon is actually the result of working in close collaboration with Telltale Games for more than ten months, to create a tool that fills the gap between artists and coders in version control."■



Codice worked with Game of Thrones dev Telltale Games to develop Plastic Gluon, a new workflow that makes version control easier for artists

Outsource www.omuk.com

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STUDIO SPOTLIGHT

This month: **Space Ape Games**

Space Ape Games
25, Soho Square,
Soho, London
W1D 3QR

E: jobs@spaceapegames.com
W: www.spaceapegames.com

What was the biggest thing to happen to Space Ape in 2014?
Simon Hade, co-founder: One of the highlights from last year was definitely winning the Develop Award for Best New Studio. As you can imagine it was a real affirmation of all the hard work we have put into Space Ape.

We were also fortunate enough to triple the size of the studio from around 25 people at the start of the year to 85 now. In connection, we were able to raise $7m to help with the launch of *Rival Kingdoms*. Last but not least, seeing the ten millionth person play *Samurai Siege* last year was absolutely awesome.

How have you continued the development of Samurai Siege? How have you retained your userbase?
Hade: We have 18 people fully devoted to *Samurai Siege* – more if you count the community and marketing team. We have really focused on live events and content. We've launched a few major feature releases throughout the year, such as Conquest Wars: 200-person multiplayer battles. These were well-received but it's the weekly events that really keep people engaged in the game.

We have a dedicated live operations function run by George Yao, who was No.1 globally in *Clash of Clans* for six months, and we're getting better every week at understanding what type of events are the most enjoyable for players.

We also invest a lot of time in our most influential players. Our top users are in our VIP club, allowing them to speak with our support agents and other top players. They are vital in giving advice on our upcoming features and providing feedback.

What have you learned from Samurai Siege and how have you applied that to Rival Kingdoms?
Hade: *Samurai Siege* was made really, really fast: a team of 12 made it in six months. We were very focused on getting the game live and paying the bills, because we had raised money but had limited runway. This meant we deliberately omitted a lot of things like leagues, heroes and quests – the fundamentals for strategy games – in exchange for doubling down key features that would make *Samurai Siege* unique.

This a key reason why the game is so successful, so no regrets about that, but it did feel like a lot of great ideas were left on the drawing board. So we decided to include them all in our new title, *Rival Kingdoms*.

You also learn a lot operating one of these games for a year. It was not obvious to us when making *Samurai Siege* how important matchmaking was, and how difficult it is to get right. Most of all, we now appreciate the power of community gameplay even more. This is something we already understood well from playing MMOs and games like *Eve Online* – and, of course, talking to players.

But the biggest thing we learned from *Samurai Siege* was that when you find yourself in a good, active alliance, working together with other players to achieve goals – that is the real game and the reason people stay and play it for years.

What are your long-term plans for Rival Kingdoms?
Hade: *Rival Kingdoms* will be global from day one, and we'll have dedicated local community teams in Japan, Korea, Germany, France and Italy to really help develop the local player community base. They will run their own events and chat rooms. Our roadmap has us doing a lot more to go really local, even to the extent we'll have Ancients – the hero troops that you collect in the game – specific to each country.

We've taken some of the best event formats from *Samurai Siege* and baked them into the core game design of *Rival Kingdoms*, but we'll experiment with new formats once we're past the initial launch period. Plus we'll continue to invest in new features and developing the storyline with Rhianna Pratchett, who created the idea for the game's story.

Are you currently expanding or recruiting at all?
Hade: We need more server developers. Our back-end is in Scala, which is something a lot of server developers are interested in learning, but we set the bar pretty high by only looking at people who have a lot of experience.

Really great product owners, producers and product managers are always in demand. And we are hunting for a chief marketing officer who can help take all our promotional activity to the next level.

By the end of the year we'll be 100 to 120 people, with at least 25 of those employees working on something truly new.

Tell us something no one knows about your studio.
Hade: We have our own Space Ape RPG that new joiners play to learn what everyone does and how to find their way around.

It has most of Soho mapped out with all our regular lunch places, and every member of Space Ape is a character in the game. ■

Space Ape Games has already grown to 85 employees, and aims to have 120 staff by the end of the year

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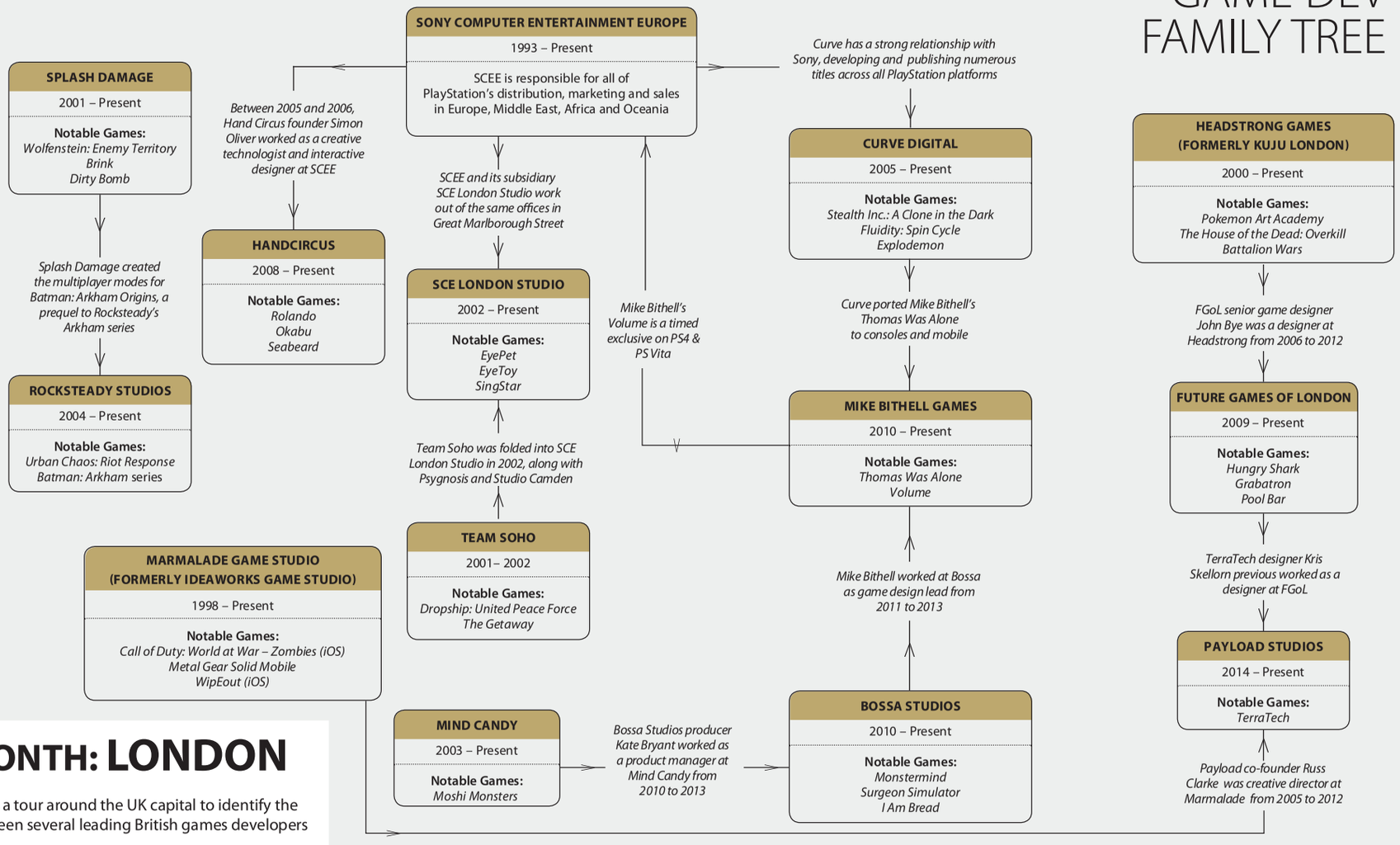
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1993 – Present
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SPLASH DAMAGE
2001 – Present
Notable Games:
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory
Brink
Dirty Bomb
Between 2005 and 2006, Hand Circus founder Simon Oliver worked as a creative technologist and interactive designer at SCEE
HANDCIRCUS
2008 – Present
Notable Games:
Rolando
Okabu
Seabeard
Splash Damage created the multiplayer modes for Batman: Arkham Origins, a prequel to Rocksteady's Arkham series
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
2004 – Present
Notable Games:
Urban Chaos: Riot Response
Batman: Arkham series
SCEE and its subsidiary SCE London Studio work out of the same offices in Great Marlborough Street
SCE LONDON STUDIO
2002 – Present
Notable Games:
EyePet
EyeToy
SingStar
Team Soho was folded into SCE London Studio in 2002, along with Psygnosis and Studio Camden
TEAM SOHO
2001– 2002
Notable Games:
Dropship: United Peace Force
The Getaway
Curve has a strong relationship with Sony, developing and publishing numerous titles across all PlayStation platforms
CURVE DIGITAL
2005 – Present
Notable Games:
Stealth Inc.: A Clone in the Dark
Fluidity: Spin Cycle
Explodemon
Mike Bithell's Volume is a timed exclusive on PS4 & PS Vita
Curve ported Mike Bithell's Thomas Was Alone to consoles and mobile
MIKE BITHELL GAMES
2010 – Present
Notable Games:
Thomas Was Alone
Volume
Mike Bithell worked at Bossa as game design lead from 2011 to 2013
BOSSA STUDIOS
2010 – Present
Notable Games:
Monstermind
Surgeon Simulator
I Am Bread
Bossa Studios producer Kate Bryant worked as a product manager at Mind Candy from 2010 to 2013
MIND CANDY
2003 – Present
Notable Games:
Moshi Monsters
MARMALADE GAME STUDIO (FORMERLY IDEAWORKS GAME STUDIO)
1998 – Present
Notable Games:
Call of Duty: World at War – Zombies (iOS)
Metal Gear Solid Mobile
WipEout (iOS)
HEADSTRONG GAMES (FORMERLY KUJU LONDON)
2000 – Present
Notable Games:
Pokemon Art Academy
The House of the Dead: Overkill
Battalion Wars
FGoL senior game designer John Bye was a designer at Headstrong from 2006 to 2012
FUTURE GAMES OF LONDON
2009 – Present
Notable Games:
Hungry Shark
Grabatron
Pool Bar
TerraTech designer Kris Skellorn previous worked as a designer at FGoL
PAYLOAD STUDIOS
2014 – Present
Notable Games:
TerraTech
Payload co-founder Russ Clarke was creative director at Marmalade from 2005 to 2012

THIS MONTH: LONDON

Lee Bradley takes a tour around the UK capital to identify the connections between several leading British games developers

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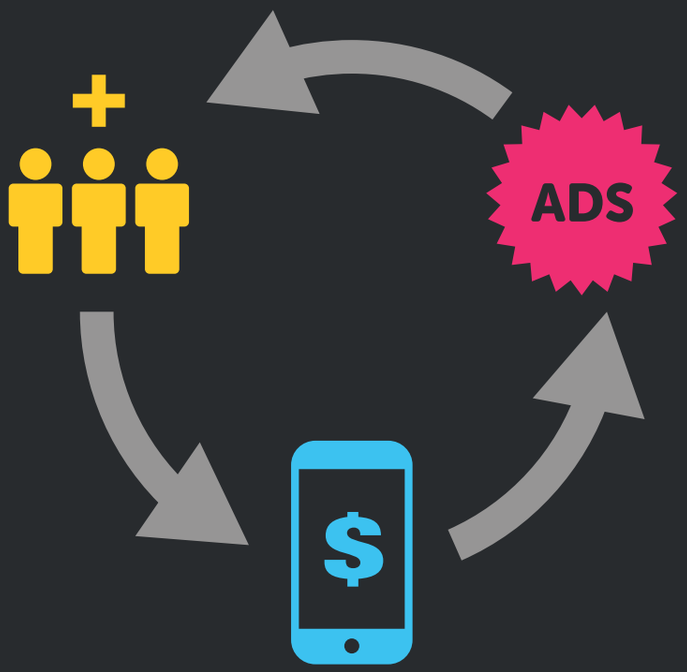

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